THE EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN CANADA UNDER THE WUSC-STUDENT REFUGEE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

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Students from refugee backgrounds under the WUSC – Student refugee Program in Canada experience a lot of challenges. The challenges are mostly attributed to their background as refugees. Having been resettled from refugee camps where both the quality of life and standards of education were not admirable, their transitioning to higher education and to a developed country is marred with many challenges. This study documents the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds that were resettled to Canada through the WUSC – Student Refugee Program. The study utilizes a phenomenological approach to focus on a sample of six students from refugee backgrounds under the WUSC – Student Refugee Program that are in Canadian universities. The study utilizes Berry's (1997) acculturation theory. The results show that the program offered them an opportunity to access higher education but also brought with it challenges that they encounter as they navigate higher education in Canada.

Keywords: *Resettlement, Acculturation, Students from refugee backgrounds, WUSC-Student Refugee Program*

To my late mother, Florence, who I will always cherish

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The myriad conflicts and crises happening in various parts of the world have created involuntary movement of people from their home communities. People have been internally displaced or have crossed their countries' borders to seek safety from conflicts, violence, persecution, drought, or human rights violations to places where they are staying as refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million people worldwide that had been involuntarily displaced, with 20.7 million of them under the UNHCR mandate (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). With students needing tertiary education also available from among the refugee populations, the UNHCR, working with governments and private organizations, provides education opportunities as one of its complementary pathways for admission of refugees to third countries in its resettlement plans (UNHCR, 2019). In this arrangement, refugee students are granted scholarships to study in higher education institutions in countries such as Belgium, Australia, USA, and Canada with a guarantee of later being permanent residents in those countries (UNHCR, 2022).

Problem Statement

Opportunities for tertiary education among refugee populations are hard to come by, with only about 5 percent of refugees in higher education institutions worldwide (Redden, 2021). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) utilizes the provision of education opportunities as one of its complementary pathways for admission of refugees to third countries in its resettlement plans (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). The UNHCR describes complementary education pathways as "safe and regulated avenues by which refugees may move to a third country for the purpose of higher education, have their international

protection needs met, while also being able to support themselves and reach sustainable and lasting solutions" (2021, para.1).

While steps are being taken to increase access to higher education for students from refugee backgrounds (SRBs) (Felix, 2016) through complementary education pathways, studies show that there remain many challenges that are affecting the current interventions. Streitwieser, Loo, et al. (2018) found that complementary education pathways partners "lack transparency about their funding support and impact on intended beneficiaries, which makes it difficult to determine their efficacy (p.1). In Canada, the Student Refugee Program (SRP) under the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) helps in the complementary academic pathway by providing resettlement with opportunities for higher education (WUSC, 2021).

However, not much is known about the experiences of students as they navigate their academic and social lives within academic pathways as WUSC-SRP and get settled in Canada. There is a need to zero in on such a student demographic to determine if proper and adequate support is accorded to them by the private resettlement organizations for their social and academic success in a new country. As refugee students are individually taken from the country of first asylum to be resettled independent of their immediate families and attend higher education, much needs to be known as to how they experience the resettlement process and their being integrated into the Canadian academic and social lives.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to understand the meaning of lived experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in Canadian universities under World University Service of Canada –Student Refugee Program. As young refugee students are resettled into Canada from camps in countries where they sought first asylum, there are a lot of challenges that they face as they adjust and

adapt to life in Canada. Programs such as WUSC-SRP have been crucial in taking the students from the camps into university campuses in Canada. Much therefore needs to be understood as to how these students navigate through life owing to the fact that they are still young, coming from a displaced background where they might have lived through violence, war or poverty, and that they enter into a totally different culture than their own where the academic and social life demands may be challenging.

Significance of the Study

The WUSC's Student Refugee Program plays a double role of resettling refugees as well as giving them access into post-secondary education; two equally taxing experiences. While the resettlement process brings with it its own demands, being a higher education student as a refugee also has its own challenges which include difficulties in navigating through new education settings, language proficiency, as well as understanding new learning environments (Foundation House, 2021). However, Felix (2016) argues that "when considering the diversity of students engaging with higher education institutions, the existence of refugees and students from refugee backgrounds (SRBs) are often overlooked (p. 91). Their limited participation in higher education risks having the meaning of their lived experiences not heard and then duly supported. This further makes it hard to hold private resettlement organizations and agencies accountable in ensuring the welfare of the resettled students.

The efficacy of interventions by private organizations and individuals aimed at collaborating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in resettling refugee students remains difficult to determine as evidenced by the limited availability of research on the experiences of students in such interventions. Very little research has been conducted on the experiences of young refugee students that are resettled along with their parents and guardians

and later attend post-secondary education, and not those who are resettled independent of their parents and guardians with the support of private organizations and individuals. Available research both indicates the impact of resettlement in helping refugee students attend higher education and providing them a stable home, as well as the challenges that they face as they navigate post-secondary education. Also available in the corpus of research are the deliberate steps that governments are taking in helping young refugees to settle in their countries, but this does not include those refugees that directly go to be resettled into those countries as university students. Further to that, available research indicates challenges that are there with the operations of the interventions aimed at helping refugee resettlement.

In understanding the experiences of refugee students within the WUSC –Student Refugee Program, recommendations will be made for future program iteration regarding the welfare of current and future students within the program. WUSC will find it beneficial as participants in the study, who are recipients of the SRP, will explain their perception of the program in relation to their experiences being students in Canada. Findings of the study will further be useful to future students that may be resettled using the academic pathway by private organizations as it will lay bare the experiences of students resettled in a similar manner thus, getting them prepared of what they may expect to experience as they arrive in Canada. The UNHCR and national governments will also benefit from this study as they design programs that resettle individual persons. The experiences of the individual students will help inform their decision-making process having known the concerns and challenges those individuals undergo when resettled without their immediate families.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines available literature on refugees, resettlement and the importance of higher education to refugees. Of note in the existing literature is the research that has been conducted on the experiences of young refugee students that are resettled along with their guardians and later attend post-secondary education, but none on those who are resettled independent of their guardians or immediate families to attend higher education with the support of private organizations and individuals. Background literature reviewed in this section therefore include the UNHCR and countries' determination of the refugee status, UNHCR's durable solutions, perceptions of refugees in host countries, Canada's policies and practices on refugees and, a background of WUSC as one of the private organizations and agencies that help the UNHCR and the Canadian government in resettling refugees.

UNHCR and Countries' Determination of a Refugee

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was established in 1950 to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes after the Second World War, but is now mandated to protect and assist refugees around the world (UNHCR, 2021) defines "refugee" as any person who:

> "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (p.14).

However, global wars, crises, and conflicts have made other countries to broaden this definition to include “people who have fled war or other forms of violence in their home country ... [and, further to that], there has also been debate about further broadening the definition to include “environmental refugees” who have been displaced as a result of natural disaster or environmental changes” (Esses et al., 2017, p.79).

There also are contentions on who should be formally given the refugee status as a result of war or conflict, mostly in western European countries, and the UNHCR states that its definition is not binding, and governments have a prerogative to “establish status determination procedures to decide a person’s legal standing and rights in accordance to their own legal systems” (UNHCR, 2002, par.9). Overall, the current number of persons designated as refugees stands at 26.6 million (UN Refugee Agency, 2021).

Acquiring a refugee status to people that seek asylum in a country is very significant as it is only by being recognized as such (i.e., a refugee) that a person is guaranteed to have their rights respected and protected as per the dictates of the 1951 Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees. At the heart of the 1951 Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees is the principle of non-refoulement which prohibits nations from expelling or returning refugees against their will, to a territory where they still fear threats to life or freedom (UNHCR, 2022). The Convention further guarantees that, upon being granted the refugee status, asylum seekers can be assisted with any of the UNHCR’s durable solutions (UNHCR, 2022). These may then explain why some countries still contend with the definition of “refugee” as the recognition of the people under such state obliges them to confer them rights and protections.

UNHCR and Durable Solutions

In a bid to make international response to the refugee problem, the UNHCR developed the framework for durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern that was aimed at ensuring that there is "greater equity in the sharing of responsibilities and burdens" (UNHCR, 2003). The UNHCR noted that, for the most part, countries hosting refugees are themselves poor, there were restrictions to some refugees' freedoms, there was a lack of inclusion of returning persons in national plans, as well as a lack of financial support to returnees, and a need to have sustainable measures for prevention, conflict resolution and peace building in post-conflict situations (UNHCR, 2003). The three durable solutions were therefore developed with the said challenges in mind. These durable solutions include (i.) voluntary repatriation, which involves refugees returning to their countries voluntarily and not under any coercion, having been given objective information before return; (ii.) local integration, where refugees are integrated into their host countries, and (iii.) resettlement, which is "the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence" (UNHCR, 2022, para. 2). The UNHCR considers resettlement as a very important tool for international protection and a durable solution for refugees (Swing, 2017).

Perceptions of Refugees in Host Countries

As the numbers of refugees keep steadily increasing, perceptions of refugees in different countries keep getting worse. As of 2021, the top five countries hosting refugees were Turkey (3.7 million), Colombia (1.7 million), Uganda (1.5 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Germany (1.2 million) (UNHCR, 2022). These numbers put a strain on social and economic resources of the countries and surely, evokes reactions from the citizenry. Matthews (2008) found that "refugees are criminalized as illegal queue jumpers and stereotyped as terrorists" (p. 34). In their study, Esses, et al. (2017) found that there was "a belief that many refugee claimants are bogus, and the

concern that refugees may pose economic and cultural threats" (p. 81), just as Ipsos (2019) found that "over half of people (54%) are doubtful that people coming to their [country] claiming to be refugees really are genuine, instead believing that they are coming to their country for economic reasons or take advantage of welfare services" (p.3). Related to the same, Hopper (2018) explicates that "states are increasingly viewing refugees and asylum seekers as a security issue. The movement of people is considered to undermine state stability and facilitate the spread of global terrorism. … In some countries, refugees and migrants are increasingly perceived as a threat to national culture and identity as well as to societal cohesion" (pp. 356-357). These perceptions are said to be exposing refugee populations to discrimination, xenophobia, social exclusion, alienation, and racism in their host countries (Yelpaze & Guler, 2018). This may have an impact on how asylum seekers get admitted as refugees and get integrated into their host countries. These perceptions also have a great bearing on how refugee students experience their lives in the countries that they have been resettled.

Student Refugees and UNHCR Durable Solutions

The UNHCR uses the provision of education opportunities as one of its complementary pathways for admission of refugees to third countries in its resettlement plans (UNHCR, 2019). The UNHCR describes complementary education pathways as "safe and regulated avenues by which refugees may move to a third country for the purpose of higher education, have their international protection needs met, while also being able to support themselves and reach sustainable and lasting solutions" (2021, para.1). However, not all students from refugee backgrounds use the academic path to resettlement as some are resettled with their immediate families within the broad UNHCR resettlement plan, or the other pathways, and later attend higher education. Other complementary pathways for admission include humanitarian admission

programs, community sponsorship of refugees, humanitarian visas, family reunification for family members, labor mobility schemes, and education programs (UNHCR, 2022).

Many countries and organizations have been working with the UNHCR in providing higher education opportunities to refugee students within the academic pathway. These countries include Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, Japan, and some European Union countries (Hughes, 2018). The UNHCR, working with some organizations and agencies, also provide scholarships such as the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), UNHCR First Country of Asylum Scholarships, UNHCR Third Country Scholarships, UNHCR Student Refugee Program, the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships, and the UNHCR Student Refugee Program to student refugees (Human Rights Careers, n.d). In the latter, the UNHCR partners with the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in its Student Refugee Program (SRP) to give scholarships to qualifying refugees from Syria, Lebanon, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, or Uganda, to go and study at select Canadian universities without having to pay for tuition for one year (Human Rights Careers, n.d).

Refugees and Higher Education

Refugees' participation in higher education is very low yet there remains a huge unmet demand for tertiary education among young refugees (UNHCR, 2012). It is estimated that there are nearly 90,000 refugee students who are known to be participating in higher education worldwide which represents 3% of the 37% global higher education access rate (UNHCR, 2019, para. 2). Crea and MacFarland (2015) state that "higher education for refugees, ...has not been a top priority for donors" (p.237) which may then help explain the limited participation of refugees in higher education. Getting to know the exact numbers of refugees in higher education is said to be sometimes difficult to ascertain due to their shifting residency status (Anderson, 2020) in

some countries as, upon being resettled as refugees, they later become permanent residents and may no longer be categorized as refugees. Nevertheless, Felix (2016) argues that "when considering the diversity of students engaging with higher education institutions, the existence of refugees and students from refugee backgrounds (SRBs) are often overlooked (p. 91). This makes this current study even more relevant as it seeks to explore the experiences of students that are easily left unnoticed.

The UNHCR, in its 2030 education strategy plans to improve refugees' participation in higher education. It is targeting to enroll "15% of college-eligible refugees in tertiary, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) or connected education programs in host and third countries, and to achieve equitable gender representation across tertiary enrolments by 2030" (UNHCR, 2019, p.9). Participation in higher education was found to be transformative in the lives of refugees as it allowed them to get employment and income (El Jack, 2012) among other things. Higher education is also said to be crucial in "promoting economic gains that are critical for post-conflict reconstruction and for poverty reduction, [and the] development of skills and confidence, which allow greater participation in civic and public life, which in turn enhances protection and quality of life for refugees" (UNHCR, 2012, pp.21-22).

Challenges Faced by Resettled Refugee Students

While resettlement provides a reprieve to the refugees from fears and threats to life as well as offering them a brighter prospect for their futures through scholarships, starting over life in a new environment poses great challenges that they have to deal with daily. Bang (2017) states that "although, at first, arrival in a new country might bring about hope and relief due to the welcome escape from traumatic events, refugee children and adolescents soon realize the difficulty of moving to a new country, and the multiple barriers they have to overcome to be a

part of the new society" (p.47). Currently, countries partnering with the UNHCR in admitting student refugees include the UK, Japan, Turkey, as well as Australia. Refugee students' challenges in these countries may be academic, emotional, social, or economic.

Academic Challenges

Language. Knowledge of a foreign language, in most cases English or French, is in itself of great advantage to refugees as it allows them access to some scholarship opportunities. For example, one of the requirements for one to be considered for the UNHCR Student Refugee Program is fluency in either English or French as universities in Canada use these languages as a medium of instruction (Human Right Careers, n.d). However, it is noted that international students find problems with English language skills when they enter universities. Since refugees are for the most part considered international students, the language problems that international students face also apply to them. Ramachandran (2011) explains that, in the UK for example, "international students often find that their English language skills are not adequate to allow them to cope in a typical English-speaking environment when they arrive" (p.203). Andrade (2006) emphasizes the importance of English language skills for the academic and social adjustment to international students as it allows them to participate in learning as well as build social networks.

Limited competency in English language skills has implications on their social and academic success. It can affect how they relate with their fellow students, participate in class activities, write assignments and exams, as well as the overall learning experience. Matthew (2008) found that refugee students were at different levels of their English language mastery

which made it hard for some to participate in the learning process. This results in very poor results in the learning and course grades (Andrea, 2006).

To ease the language challenges that refugee students face, Canada supports refugees who are being resettled into their country in any of the pathways, and not just students, in acquiring French or English language skills. Through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, refugees take a self-assessment language test online which allows them to have an idea of their language proficiency level (Government of Canada, 2019). This allows them to select the kind of language training that they require from among basic, intermediate, or advanced levels for language training. Nevertheless, it is argued that "for some, the trauma of moving to a new country and learning a new language can be greater than previous traumas of war and refugee camps" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2021, para. 2).

Different Pedagogy Styles. The poor school conditions as well as the teaching methods of secondary schools in refugee camps do not adequately prepare refugee students to later participate in higher education in most western countries. Higher education institutions in western countries encourage active participation in the learning process which does not bode well with students who come from text and memory-based education systems where learners are passive participants in the learning process (Ramachandran, 2011). Mitchell et al. (2017), reported that, in the United States, they found that the "teacher-centered approach used in many students' homelands limited the amount of discussion held among students, making it hard for them to enjoy and participate in group work" (p.2). According to Joyce et al. (2010), refugee students noted the differences in "styles of education systems in their country of origin and in Australia, with a greater reliance on

assignments and self-directed learning in Australia. These then, are said to affect the overall performance in their studies as, in some classes, participation is assessed.

Emotional Challenges

The refugee experience is said to cause lasting psychological impact on individuals as some may be victims of war, rape, violence, torture, or crime and may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). This is said to have an impact on their learning and, as Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) explain, "people who come from war-torn zones and have posttraumatic stress or anxiety—all their symptoms basically prevent them from learning and adapting" (p.417). Overall, Mitchel et al., (2017) in their study concluded that "the situation of being a refugee, and their backgrounds, were significant factors impacting on participants' university experiences and successes and they were affected by stress [and] anxiety" (p.88) among other factors.

Social Challenges

Social interactions provide opportunities for expressing oneself and getting to know other people. Through socializing with others, refugee students get an opportunity to learn of other people's norms, practices, and traditions which may aid in easily integrating into a new environment. However, for refugee students, getting to know and make friends is a difficult task (Joyce et al., 2010). In Canada, refugee students stated that they found it challenging to make friends with Canadians due to the language barrier and Canadians' individualism (Aldiabat et al., 2021). Inability to create meaningful social networks is said to expose refugees to "isolation, exclusion, inter-ethnic conflict, discrimination and victimization" (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, p.417). Mude and Mwanri (2020) found that, in Australia, difficulties to develop social networks

led to the feelings of marginalization and the experience of 'not belonging' among refugees. This has greater consequences on refugee students' academic and social lives.

The social challenges are said to emanate from as early as while the refugees are still at the camp abroad as they are not adequately prepared for the life in the new country. The pre-arrival information that is given to the refugees is usually not enough to prepare refugees for the realities of life in a new country. Among Syrian refugees that were resettled in Canada, it was found that "although they were informed about life in Canada and attended educational sessions about Canadian culture before they arrived, real-life experiences are different from generalizations covered in theoretical sessions" (Aldiabat, et al., 2021, p.485) which was a great challenge to their integration.

Economic Challenges

Financial problems is another challenge that refugee students face when they are resettled into new countries. In their study, Joyce et al (2010) found that refugee students in Australia faced economic challenges as "many participants send money back to their family and relatives as often as they can to support them, on top of providing for themselves and those they live with, which affects their time spent studying. Most participants worked part time or during university holiday times. Some worked in factories or night shift work that affected their concentration and attendance at university" (p.92). Lack of finances resources is said to have contributed to lower levels of academic achievement among refugee students in the USA (Andrade, 2006). For students that are resettled by private organizations, studies found that they are only provided with full scholarships but not given living expenses (Streitwieser et al., 2018) The UNHCR Student Refugee Program, for example, refugee students are only assured of a full tuition for only one year on a four-year program of study (Human Rights Careers, n.d). Students are thus left to ted

for themselves for the remainder of the three years to their academic study which puts a financial strain on their lives.

Canada and Refugees

Canada has a long history of being a refuge for refugees, with the first known "refugees" finding refuge in it in as early as 1776 when 3,000 black loyalists fled the oppression of the American Revolution and sought shelter there (Government of Canada, 2021). Since then, Canada has been providing refuge to refugees from different parts of the world. Canada's openness to welcoming refugees is said to be necessitated by how the general public is made to view the advantages of having immigrants and refugees in their country. Hyndman et al. (2021) report that "Canadian public opinion has been pro-immigration in general over recent decades because the arrival of newcomers and high levels of immigration are framed as part of a nation-building narrative and as key to economic prosperity" (p.3). According to the Government of Canada website, to aid the resettlement of refugees, Canada devised a two-part refugee system which consists of the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, and the In-Canada Asylum Program. The former is people who need protection from outside Canada while the latter is for people making refugee protection claims from within Canada.

Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program

In this program, refugees apply for resettlement with the UNHCR that works in collaboration with other private sponsors to determine individual cases. Through the 1976 Immigration Act, groups of five or more individuals are allowed to sponsor one or more immigrants or refugees to come into Canada (Lanphier, 2003). The Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program matches refugees identified by the UNHCR with private sponsors in Canada. Claims are identified and processed. Successful applicants are resettled with the help of

these private sponsors, known as Sponsorship Agreement Holders, that have signed sponsorship agreements with the Canadian government to help support refugees (Government of Canada, 2021). The World University Service of Canada, which runs the UNHCR Student Refugee Program, operates within this Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program.

The sponsorship program is not without criticism however. Patterson (2010) explains that:

> "some have identified an "assimilationist orientation" on the part of some sponsoring individuals, in which behavioral expectations are imposed on refugees, while at the same time sponsors often have little or no knowledge of the cultures and societies of the refugees themselves. Another problem that has been identified concerns the ambiguity of the refugee's relationship to his or her sponsor. Are they dependents? partners? cooperants? Are refugees expected to conform or oblige in return for the assistance they receive, for example, by behaving in certain ways or by agreeing to participate in certain social or religious activities with their sponsors?" (p.115).

In-Canada Asylum Program

This program offers refugee protection to people in Canada who are judged to have a well-founded fear of persecution or are at risk of torture, or cruel or unusual punishment if they are to return to their home countries. Only individuals that not been convicted of serious criminal offences or had not have previous refugee claims denied by Canada are allowed to eligible to seek asylum through this program (Government of Canada, 2021).

Canada's refugee sponsorship programs have gained successes and criticism through the years.

Private Sponsors of Resettlement: World University Service of Canada (WUSC)

To ensure a systematic process of providing education to refugees at university level, the government of Canada works with WUSC (Viviene, 2016) who, in partnership with the UNHCR provides scholarships to qualifying refugees to go and study in Canada through the Student Refugee Program. Student Refugee Program is touted as the only program that combines resettlement and opportunities for higher education to refugees (WUSC, 2022). The program started operating in 1978 and has, since then, resettled 1160 students taken directly from the refugee camps to study in Canada as permanent residents (WUSC, 2022).

The program operates in Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda. According to WUSC (2022), general requirements for one to be considered into the program include; be currently facing barriers to accessing or completing post-secondary education, be a refugee living in a country of asylum in which the program operates, be between 18-25 years and without children or dependents, be self-reliant, mature and suitable for integration in Canada, must have completed secondary school and have official and original transcripts of educational documents, must be competent in English or French and, must be eligible for resettlement under Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees program. Peterson (2012) argues that it is very involving for refugees to successfully apply and be resettled to Canada as "it takes a minimum of eighteen months from the time a student is selected until the day they land in Canada" (p.113).

Successful refugee students are offered a one-year scholarship at a Canadian university and granted permanent residence. The Government of Canada regulations stipulate that private sponsors, such as WUSC, "must provide financial and emotional support to any refugees they sponsor for the length of the sponsorship period, or until the refugee can support themselves, if this happens during that period" (Government of Canada, 2022, para. 13). In some cases, refugees can be getting sponsorship for up to three years.

Criticisms against Private Sponsors of Resettlement

Canada's efforts at supporting refugee resettlement through the Private Sponsors of Resettlement Program has attracted criticism from scholars and observers alike. Arce (2022) reported that there is "inadequate monitoring of the day-to-day work of sponsorship groups, with talk of unethical use of sponsorship money and instances of sponsorship breakdown" (para.12). Private sponsors have also been accused of their paternalistic tendencies where resettled refugees complained that their sponsors used to "infantilize them, doubt their capability and skills, and fail to offer them sufficient opportunities to become independent'' (Elcioglu, 2021, p.4). Nancarrow et al. observed that "the sponsorship program seemed to be falling short of ensuring successful resettlement and integration for the newcomers it intended to help" (para. 15) due to the lack of proper support services and regular monitoring.

Theoretical Framework

Arriving in a new society can both be exciting and stressful to refugee students. As resettlement entails being offered protection and finding relief from the harsh conditions of refugee camp life, resettlement can be exciting as one anticipates great opportunities and relatively easy access to life sustaining goods, services, and opportunities. However, the resettlement process itself can also be stressful when one faces the realities of life following their settlement in a new country (Mude & Mwanri, 2000). Research shows that refugee students' being resettled and coming into contact with new social systems, social structures, cultural habits, and customs creates stress and challenges in their everyday lives (Bang, 2017). Other studies indicate that pre-migration conditions for refugees also have profound impact on the acculturation process as some refugees might have experienced or witnessed violence which may affect their mental health which makes their adaptation to a new life to be very stressful (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). To understand the acculturation process for the refugee students,

I will use Berry's acculturation theory.

Acculturation Theory

Berry (1997) posits that "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (p.7). Berry (2005) explains that "acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (p.698). Organista et al. (2009) extend Berry's definition by describing acculturation as a "culture learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group" (p.102).

In explaining the acculturation process, Berry (1997) identified four ways on how people can acculturate to new settings, and these include assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation occurs when one foregoes their cultural identity and freely interacts with the new cultures. Separation is said to occur when one insists on their culture and try their best to avoid interaction with other cultures. Integration is when there is a balance in maintaining one's original culture while fully interacting with other cultural groups. Finally, marginalization is when an individual is neither interested in maintaining their culture nor having relations with other cultural groups (Berry, 1997).

Berry (1997) further explains that different groups experience the acculturation process due to the three factors of voluntariness, which is how individuals find themselves in a new culture as either voluntarily, as in the case of immigrants, or involuntarily, as in the case of refugees who come into a new culture without their deliberately willing it: mobility, where one

comes into contact with a new culture by migrating into a new location, as is the case with immigrants and refugees and, permanence, which explains the length of time how one experiences the acculturation process, as in immigrants who have relatively settled and are going through the process, and those who temporarily experience it and may return to their homes.

As acculturation involves encountering new systems, languages, traditions, and practices, it can be a challenging process to individuals. It is particularly challenging to resettled refugees who find themselves in a new culture involuntarily. Bang (2017) argues that attempts to adjust to another culture often bring about acculturative stress. Berry (2005) defines acculturative stress as a "stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation" (p.708). The reaction has great implications on how refugees develop a sense of self and how they find their own place within a wider society.

Refugees navigate the acculturation process in different ways. In Canada, Aldiabat et al (2021) found that among Syrian refugees, the acculturation process involved attempts at integration as per Berry's model, but they still had struggles with understanding the Canadian culture and integrate themselves into the Canadian society as they continued to make comparisons between their own culture with Canadian culture.

Berry's acculturation theory therefore provides a good framework for understanding how refugee students navigate through their academic and social lives as they undergo the acculturation process.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of refugee university students in Canada under the WUSC- Student Refugee Program. The study focuses on how the students from refugee background navigate through life in Canada as students, and as they get integrated into the Canadian society as to later become permanent residents. It explores the experience of being a student who was taken from a refugee camp abroad and, through the WUSC Student Refugee Program, found scholarships to go and study in Canada where they got resettled. As the WUSC Student Refugee Program "combines resettlement with opportunities for higher education" (McGill, 2022, para. 3), the study seeks to understand the role of WUSC in both pre-departure and post-arrival experiences of the students and how these prepare them for success in their academics and integration into the Canadian society. The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of students from refugee background under the WUSC-Student Refugee Program when navigating higher education in Canada?
2. How does WUSC prepare and support students for life in Canada?

This will be a qualitative study design which will employ a phenomenological approach which involves "looking very closely at the phenomena under study to explore the complex world of lived experiences from the actors (those who live it) point of view" (Qutoshi, 2018, p.220). The study will particularly utilize interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology which "is interested in how particular people in particular contexts make meaning and interpret their experiences ... [as well as] interested in research participants' perspectives on their experiences and in their somewhat distinctive experiences rather than attempting to describe their transcendental experience" (Christensen & Johnson, 2016, p.596).

While there is abundant research literature on the experiences of university students from refugee background, there remains a gap in capturing the essence of resettlement experience among refugees who come unaccompanied to start a new life in resettled countries through private sponsorship programs such as WUSC. The ontological assumption of interpretive phenomenological analysis that "lived experience is an interpretive process situated in an individual's lifeworld" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.92) therefore would help us to understand how these refugees make sense of their whole resettlement experience from the time they were selected into the WUSC Student Refugee Program until the time they were brought into Canada and integrating into the academic and social lives there. Being refugees taken from a camp in which living conditions are usually poor (Mendola & Busetta, 2018) and racially homogenous, and brought into Canada, a developed society with many life opportunities and racial diversity, has a profound impact on how individuals make sense of the world around them. The fact that they also come as university students compounds the way their lives are impacted by the resettlement experience as transition into higher education is found to be a taxing endeavor in as far as psychological wellbeing is concerned (Huguenel & Conley, 2020). With little research on the experiences of refugee university students resettled by private sponsors, as well as my personal experiences with refugee students, I was motivated to conduct this study. As interpretive phenomenological analysis is interested in specific people's experiences at particular times and places, and not the transcendental experiences, (Christensen & Johnson, 2016), I will collect data from individual refugee students in Canadian universities that deeply describe their resettlement experience. These will specifically be those refugee students that were resettled in Canada by the World University Service of Canada and are still pursuing their university studies.

As interpretive phenomenology is grounded in interpretation of experiences and phenomena of individuals' realities (Neubauer et al., 2019), I will first collect rich data that will offer deep descriptions of the resettlement process as experienced by each individual study participant from which I will use for the description and interpretation. Cresswell (2016) recommends that a phenomenological study may have three to fifteen participants "who have experienced the phenomenon" (p.61), data will be collected from six to ten participant refugee university students under WUSC as I will need to conduct deep interviews which may require a lot of time and thorough analysis of the same.

Researcher Subjectivity and Epoche

My interest in understanding the experiences of refugee students, as earlier stated, emanated from my personal encounters when I was a High School teacher in Malawi. I taught many students that were staying as refugees in the nearby Dzaleka Refugee Camp. As a researcher in interpretive phenomenology cannot claim to be bias free as she is part of the world (Neubauer, 2019), I will go into this study aware that my own previous knowledge may affect and shape my understanding and interpretation of this phenomenon. With this in mind, engaging in epoche; which entails the researcher exploring their own experiences so as acknowledge their own assumptions, viewpoints, and prejudices, concerning a phenomenon will help in ensuring the validity of this study (Merriam, 2009). By acknowledging my own assumptions and experiences, I will set them aside and allow the experiences of the participants to be understood and analyzed with little interference from my personal experiences.

My prior experiences with refugee students introduced me to the young refugees' plight where many of them lacked opportunities for higher education. The Malawi government laws did not allow refugee students to be enrolled into the public universities. For those that could enroll

in private universities, they could not be allowed to work in the country due to the country's encampment laws which prohibit refugees from staying or working outside of their designated refugee camp (Kateta, 2021). When I came to learn of the scholarship opportunities available in the refugee camps, rumor was that they were only given to sons and daughters of the affluent among the refugee population. Claims of corruption and bribery were therefore rampant in the administration and the attaining of the WUSC scholarship.

I personally knew a student who applied into the WUSC Student Refugee Program. He was successfully accepted into the program and got resettled to Canada. His being resettled alone to a country where there was not any member of his immediate family made me to develop further interest as to how this program is run. While I was excited for him, I feared for this young boy's life as he was getting into a program which did not guarantee him full funding for his studies and yet, his family was very far away from him.

My own coming to the United States of America for graduate school taught me how hard it is to be in a new environment without the usual psychosocial support that one grows up with. It was difficult to make friendships. It was a challenging task to adapt to the new pedagogy styles which were participatory unlike where I was coming from which were most teacher centered. It also required a greater use of technology, which I was poorly skilled in. Financial challenges were difficult to overcome. This experience made me consider the younger refugee students who were coming from refugee camps and transitioning from High School into higher education as to how they could navigate through such an experience.

When I started my graduate program, my interest was in how refugees and marginalized populations can access education. Some of my readings on the operations of some organizations that help to provide resettlement opportunities to refugees included criticisms which indicated

grave disregard for refugees' agency and capabilities as well as showed that they were not transparent in how they run their programs and, in particular, in the way they support refugee students whenever they have been resettled. I therefore had feelings of pity for the young refugee students, and great cynicism for such organizations. I then chose to specifically understand the experiences of refugee university students that were resettled in Canada through the WUSC Student Refugee Program.

By acknowledging how my personal experiences as a teacher to refugee students and the impact that the readings in some of my graduate courses have shaped my understanding of the resettlement process through the process of epoche, I will set aside these prejudices, assumptions, and viewpoints so as to understand the essence of the resettlement experience from the research participants' own perspective (Cresswell, 2006). I will regularly be reflective about my biases, fully aware that my subject position, methods, and questions may impact my data so as to ensure the validity of the study (Sloan and Bowe, 2013).

Participants

The participants in this study are refugee university students that were resettled to Canada through the WUSC-Student Refugee Program. Refugee students, in the study, shall mean those students that were in refugee camps abroad and, through the WUSC Student Refugee Program, found scholarships to go and study in Canada. Snowball sampling will be used in recruiting the participants. Snowball sampling involves asking research participants "to identify one or more additional people who meet certain characteristics and may be willing to participate in the research study" (Christensen & Johnson, 2016, pp.364-365). Alase (2017) recommends that in a phenomenology study, "participants must be selected from amongst a homogeneous sample pool of participants to understand the true make-up of the research subject-matter (p.13). These

participants identified were therefore to be those that had been resettled through the WUSC Student Refugee Program and they were still in institutions of higher education in Canada at the time of the study. The Institutional Review Board of Bowling Green State University approved the recruitment of the participants before the commencement of the project.

As soon as the IRB approved this study, I contacted a refugee university student under WUSC whom I identified via social media asking them to participate in this study. After their agreeing to participate in the study, I employed the snowball sampling technique where key participants were asked to refer to me other participants with similar characteristics (Merriam, 2009) whom I asked if they could be willing to participate in the study. To those that had expressed willingness to participate in the study, I sent them an email containing the recruitment script and an informed consent form which I asked them to read and sign upon fully understanding my study's purpose, expressing their initial willful participation in the study.

Through this recruitment process, six participants with an age range of 23 to 26 were recruited. There were three male as well as three female participants that were involved. One of the participants was resettled to Canada from the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, while the remaining five participants were resettled from the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi. Pseudonyms are utilized to describe the participants so as to ensure their confidentiality. I chose the refugees that are still in universities as they are currently undergoing the resettlement process as students while transitioning into becoming permanent residents of Canada. These two related experiences help capture the essence of resettlement and how they choose to identify themselves in terms of their national identity as well as the process of being members of the wider Canadian society. All participants did their secondary education and spent most of their lives in the countries of their first asylum where they were not recognized as citizens and could not access

higher education; living in restricted camp environment, which would help them to critically reflect on their newly found freedom of being recognized as citizens and having access to higher education and work opportunities. Their being refugee students resettled to Canada through the WUSC program where the requirements for, and benefits to all applicants are similar guaranteed that the participants surely experienced related phenomena.

Data Collection

I identified the first participant and scheduled an interview appointment with him. As snowball sampling was used to identify the other participants into this study, this first participant referred me to a potential participant who also referred me to another potential participant that further kept the cycle running up until I reached the sixth participant and could not get any more leads. As in-depth interviews that utilize semi-structured and open-ended questions are seen to be an effective way of gathering data in phenomenological research (Merriam, 2009), they were employed to collect data from participants in this study. In-depth interviews are said to allow the researcher to gather data that is useful for transcript analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p.1297). Before the beginning of each interview, participants signed the consent form and verbally agreed to their willing participation in the study. They were again reminded that they could withdraw their participation at any point or choose not to answer some questions without any repercussions. I conducted the interview online via Zoom due to cost and distance to Canada. As I needed to have the interviews recorded, I also sought verbal consent from the participants to start recording the interview. During the interview, the participants could ask me to paraphrase some questions so that they were really answering what I was asking them while I also sought some clarification as well as deeper explanations on some of their answers. The length of the

interviews conducted ranged from 45 minutes to 65 minutes. I ensured that I used epoche to bracket any of my biases and assumptions throughout the interviews (Cresswell, 2007).

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were transcribed using Otter.ai, a data transcription software which transcribes voice conversations into written notes. I then double checked the transcripts against the voice recordings to see if the notes accurately captured the voice conversations. In instances where the transcription software did not accurately capture the voice recordings, I manually corrected the errors and presented the exact words of the participants. When analyzing data, I utilized Creswell's (2007) approach to phenomenological analysis. This first involves epoche, where I first acknowledged and set aside my personal experiences and directed the focus on the study participants (Creswell, 2007). As I had prejudices against the work of WUSC due to the readings I had encountered in my studies, I set them aside so that they should not affect the conversations that I had with the study participants during the interviews, as well as before I read the transcripts to allow myself to have a new perspective as presented by the participants who are within the student refugee program.

The next step that I took was coding, which "is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p.173). By involving myself in open coding, I listed the significant words or statements from the transcripts (Creswell, 2007). I therefore read each transcript and highlighted every significant statement that I could identify. It was from these significant statements that I developed clusters of meaning into themes where overlapping and repetitive statements as observed from the open coding process were removed (Cresswell, 2007). I thus did coding and thematic description which allowed for descriptive reporting. My focus

was on the essence of the resettlement experience and not specific ideas or sentiments that participants could give in the interviews. As I read every transcript, through memoing I wrote reflective notes to myself on what I was learning from my data which included concepts and patterns that I was observing (Christensen & Johnson, 2016).

Informed Consent

One of the ethical concerns in research is the issue of informed consent which requires that participants are duly informed of the purpose of the study, the anticipated risks and/or benefits, and that they indicate their willingness to participate in a study (Merriam, 2009). Research participants were therefore asked to give their written informed consent by signing the IRB-approved consent form before the beginning of each interview. I first sent them the informed consent form through their emails, asking them to thoroughly read it and clearly understand the purpose of the study and their expected role in it. In the IRB-approved informed consent form, I indicated that their participation in the study would be voluntary, and they may cease their participation at any time without an explanation or any fear of penalty. I also promised them confidentiality where their identities would not be revealed. To enhance confidentiality, I asked them to choose a pseudonym that they would want to be referred to through the whole research process. They were further assured that their participation poses no greater risk than experienced in daily life and were asked to contact me or my advisor on the contact details that were given if they have any questions or concerns about the study. I ensured that consent was a continual process as, during the interview, I asked participants to further verbally consent to their participation in the study and their permission to allow me to record the interview so that I could use the recording for transcription.

Validity

Reactivity and researcher bias were the main validity threats to this study. Undertaking a study among students from refugee backgrounds that were resettled into Canada could have been affected by their not feeling free to articulate their honest experiences and only report experiences that indicate gratitude and appreciation to the country and the organization that gave them an opportunity for higher education and citizenship status for fear of reprisals. This was likely to greatly affect data collection as well as the results. I therefore emphasized the confidentiality of their participation by using pseudonyms and strict removing any identifiers from the final report. I also ensured that the data collected was safely kept and only accessed by myself and my advisor.

My experiences as a teacher to refugee students and my prior readings that cast the operations of organizations such as WUSC in negative light would also have led to researcher bias and therefore threaten the validity of the study. By employing reflexivity, I actively "engaged [myself] in critical self-reflection about [my] potential biases and predispositions" (Christensen & Johnson, 2016, p.411) which allowed me to control those biases and let the experiences of the participants define the whole course of the study.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the meaning of lived experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in Canadian universities under World University Service of Canada –Student Refugee Program. For a thorough understanding of the experiences of refugee students as they navigate through life in Canada, it was imperative for me to first understand their lived experiences before coming to Canada and their access to education and other opportunities in the countries of first asylum.

This chapter presents the findings of the study. I first present the conditions of life that the study participants lived before they were resettled to Canada, the resettlement process, and then their entry into and participation in Canadian higher education system and society. Later, I present a summary of findings where themes from different personal experiences are presented.

Participants' Profiles

Six individuals who came from Jordan and Malawi as countries of first asylum were the participants in this study. This table below provides details about the participants. For confidentiality purposes, names used are simply pseudonyms which they chose on their own, and not the participants' actual names.

Table 1.

Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender, Age	Year of Study	Year of Resettlement to Canada	Refugee Camp Resettled From
Shirin	Female, 25	3	2019	Zaatari, Jordan
Thoko	Female, 23	3	2019	Dzaleka, Malawi
Chimwemwe	Female, 23	3	2019	Dzaleka, Malawi
Calvin	Male, 24	4	2019	Dzaleka, Malawi

John Bosco	Male, 26	2	2019	Dzaleka, Malawi
Jean-Pierre	Male, 25	3	2018	Dzaleka, Malawi

Organization of Themes

Six main themes and diverse subthemes for each emerged from the interviews with the six participants and the analysis.

Theme 1: Conditions of Life in the Country of First Asylum

All participants were resettled from refugee camps in the country of first asylum. They shared similar responses when they were asked to explain the conditions of life in the countries where they had sought refuge before being resettled to Canada. They talked about tough living conditions in the refugee camps, and the restrictions that they faced in their pursuit of educational and economic opportunities. The two subthemes that emerged from their responses included tough living conditions in refugee camps, and restrictions on refugee education and work opportunities.

Tough Living Conditions in Refugee Camps

All participants talked about the tough living conditions that they lived in while in their respective countries of first asylum. Thoko explained the tough living conditions of being a refugee while also being raised by a single mother. She says:

> I stayed in Malawi for 19 years. Life, life was not as simple and easy because we're like in a refugee camp. So we, I and my two brothers were dependent on my mother. She was like a single mom. So she had to hustle for us to live, for us to get food, be able to go to school. So it wasn't as easy for her or for us. But with God's grace, we managed to attain both primary and secondary school and were able to get good grades and applied for WUSC.

Recalling the living conditions in a refugee camp in a developing country, Jean-Pierre explains the worse than prison-like conditions that he and other refugees had to live in:

> It's worse, it's worse than even people who actually are in prison here. Because you have to understand that where I come from, it's a place where you do not have the basic needs that every human being has, like, you know, people survive on less than on less than 50 cents a day. Like it's worse, it's worse. You know, I understand then you know, if someone hearing this will be a be like, yeah, because of inflation and all that the money can actually buy something and all that, but you know, it's not really like that, because, you know, people like that, it's like, the way they live, they just, they survive, basically survive every day. They're not like us, like me I just live life, like, I just live life. But then people that side where I came from, they survive. Someone put, like someone would put in a language, a figure of speech like, you know, they are literally living in hell, you know, I wouldn't want to describe it like that. Yeah. If someone would put it that in those words, I wouldn't deny it. Because it's literally like, it's something that I do, I would no wish someone to actually live in those conditions. You're coming from a third world country. And in that third world country, which is Malawi, Malawi is the poorest country on earth. And I was living in a refugee camp in that country. So how worse can it get? I don't think it gets any worse than that.

All participants explained that it was tough being in a refugee camp as there was overcrowding, limited access to food as they had to rely on food rations from the World Food Program which could not adequately feed their families, and the general lack of life opportunities. John Bosco says:

> It's challenging, there are not a lot of opportunities. So you go to school, you graduate from high school, but you can't get higher education. There are some, there is a university course college in the camp. even if you go there, it's a three-year diploma. Even if you graduate, you don't get a job. You don't get a job. So it's a little different from coming here to Canada, there are a lot of opportunities. You can choose to be in class, you cannot choose to go to school, you'll still get employed and you still live your life you'll still be able to buy necessities of life, which was hard in the camp. So if you don't have a job, that means you have to depend on World food program, or from your parents from farming. And farming also, like lands... they are very scarce.

In his assessment, Calvin says, “as refugees, it’s like a struggle”. Calvin explains that because he was skilled in soccer, he managed to play outside the refugee camp in one of the leading football teams in Malawi and could get money which he could support himself and his family. However, when he was about to sign a professional contract with the team, once it was known that he was a refugee, he was turned down and that marked the end of his footballing career in the country.

Lack of Rights

All participants explained that they lacked rights which had a bearing on every other aspect of their lives. As refugees, their lack of citizenship status limited their access to the other opportunities that could only be accessed by citizens of the country. They explained that their being refugees left them without any rights as the laws governing refugee status in countries of first residence kept them confined and restricted in refugee camps. John Bosco explains that:

> You have a lot of restrictions on you. It's like you can't, you don't have the freedom that everyone has, and you don't, you do not enjoy the same privileges that every citizen of

> any other country enjoys. So as a refugee, you're restricted to remain like to remain in the camp and your movement is restricted in the camp and you can't do anything outside the camp, otherwise, it'd be considered illegal, which, of course, anyone can do in the country when they're citizens at the same time.

As their freedom of movement or pursuit of economic activity was greatly limited, all participants explained that their lives only revolved around the perimeters of the refugee camp, which further made life tough. They said they could not go out to get jobs or do any business outside of the camps. This made their lives miserable. Shirin explains how she was even restricted on which volunteer activities she could be engaged in despite her willingness to freely work. She further says that if ever she was to go out of camp for a few hours, she had to seek permission. She says:

> Living as a refugee doesn't give you a lot of rights. Like you literally live on what you are given. Like whatever they are giving you in this place. That's what you got. You are not allowed to work or have any occupation. You can just volunteer within specific things. You're restricted like to live in that area of the camp, people were not allowed to leave without like a permission. You have to go and get permission just to leave to be just for specific hours, literally like you're living without rights and you're just living without the future or hope.

For most of the participants, their lack of rights made them live a very harsh life. For some, they were born in refugee camps and lived a life that they would not wish for anybody else to ever experience it. Jean Pierre explains:

> I was born a refugee. It's not something that I was looking forward to, or there wasn't a life that I was looking forward to live. But I'd say it was now that I live the life that I live right now in Canada, I'd say the experience was not a life that someone would actually wish to live.

Chimwemwe agrees that:

> It was hard, like being a refugee as well, there were like so many limitations as to what you can do, what you can achieve, or how easy it will be for you to do what it is that you want to do. Because of my status as a refugee.

The experience of life in the refugee camps in the country of first asylum reported by participants was in terms of harsh living conditions and lack of basic rights. All participants explained that they lived lives which were mainly controlled by forces beyond them. For them to get food, they say they had to rely on monthly rations that are supplied by the World Food Program. Their engagement in economic activities was limited by the fact that they were not allowed to run businesses or get a job outside of the camp. For those that could try to engage in farming activities, due to the overpopulation in the camp, it had put a strain on land resources, so it was difficult to find farming land. As the limitation on their rights also meant they could not access public higher education, seeking scholarships was their only hope which leads us to the second theme of WUSC – Student Refugee Program among refugee populations.

Theme 2: WUSC – Student Refugee Program among Refugee Populations

All participants explained how, due to the limitations that are placed on their access to public higher education, the WUSC – Student Refugee Program is viewed among the refugee student population. The following subthemes emerged from the responses that were given: (1) WUSC as a source of motivation (2) WUSC as a way to freedom (3) Competitiveness of the

program (3) meaning of the selection into the program, and (4) WUSC's preparation of students for resettlement.

WUSC as a Source of Motivation

Almost all participants explained how from a young age, the knowledge of the existence of the WUSC – Student Refugee Program motivated them to work hard in school. Despite the limited resources that were said to be available at the schools in the refugee camps, the hope of being admitted into the WUSC program motivated them to work hard in their studies to the point of making great life sacrifices. Jean-Pierre says before he knew about the WUSC program, he never had any reason to work hard in school for. Because he was aware that even if he were to work hard and be qualified for admission into university, the country's governing laws did not allow him to attend public higher education. It was until he learnt of WUSC program that everything changed. He says:

> I wasn't really sure of what I wanted to do. And I wasn't even aware of WUSC, it was until in high school, I think it was, it was Form two, which is like grade 10. It's the equivalent of grade 10, here in North America. And this was when actually, I knew about WUSC, I was like, oh, you know, at least, you know, now I have a goal that I, you know, I have, like, I have something to look forward to, have something that can actually give me the guarantee that there might be a slight chance of having a future of going to uni.

Beginning from this moment, Jean-Pierre says he started working extra hard until he got good grades at the national examinations which allowed him to apply for WUSC – Student Refugee Program and he was successful. Having known about the program while still young,

Thoko says she was motivated to work hard in school as it was the only chance to get higher education. She says:

> Um, so for kids or for the youth that stay in Dzaleka refugee camp, we always work hard in school because we always look forward to apply for WUSC, it's a program that's well known in the camp. And it's the only opportunity that refugee kids can be able to apply for and be able to attend their tertiary education. So in Malawi, it's not as easy for refugee students to go to universities, to Malawian universities because of the restrictions. Yeah, so the only chance that one can get is either you're selected into the WUSC Program, or you go to HEM, it provides different courses, online courses.

For Chimwemwe, knowing that the WUSC – Student Refugee Program was an option for her made her make sacrifices that would help her make it into the program. She says she was always encouraged by her parents who reminded her that her future better lay in being resettled to a country where she can be given rights to education, pursuit of economic activity, as well as protection as a citizen. She says:

> It was definitely at the top of my list; it was a priority for me. Being a refugee, I knew this was an option for me. And I had that in mind, throughout my whole, like, study journey, like in primary as well as in high school. And my parents were always like, talk about, like, yeah, you have to work hard. So you can get a chance to, you know, go to Canada, that's the only way you stand it show that like a bright future, like at having freedom. So I had that in mind. And it really influenced whatever choice I was making while I was in school, who I chose to hang out with how I chose to conduct myself in school, I deprived, deprived myself of a lot of things because I was like, Okay, let me just sacrifice these years and just do what I need to know. So that I get a chance, if will, if

> I if I'm going to like make it to Canada, then I would have a chance to do whatever else I want to do.

As life in the refugee camp has an ending in young people's lives where they know that after finishing high school there is nowhere else that they can go, participants said they usually live a life of no hope for a future. With WUSC program promising them a possibility for a life beyond the refugee camp perimeters, they are motivated with hope and confidence for the future. John Bosco recalls how the knowledge of his limitations put pressure on his life and how then WUSC gave him a purpose to stay in school. He says:

> I did not know what I what I wanted to do, because I knew, I knew I was aware of the fact that I cannot really go to public schools, and you know, be like everybody else because of my status in the country, because I knew that this was not my country of origin, I was aware of my status. And that really was putting a lot of pressure on me. And sometimes, it was sometimes, make me, you know, lose focus on what I want. But then as soon as I knew about WUSC I was able to focus and actually continue, like, you know, working hard and knowing that as soon as I'm done with high school, this is what I'm going to do. So, it gave me a purpose, gave me a purpose, to continue with school, and have hope. And I wasn't the only one, even people who I know who were aware of this opportunity. It gave me gave me an opportunity to actually focus, actually, have a purpose be like, Okay, I'm going to school, because I want to be able to apply for WUSC going to be taken and go to Canada to pursue my education to continue to, you know, tertiary education, you know, because I feel like if I didn't have that, then there is no hope. I was determined that I have to make it no matter what I have to make. This was my only hope.

However, some participants said that the fact that being admitted into the WUSC – Student Refugee Program would mean being resettled to Canada made them not excited about it. Shirin explains that it is not a norm in their culture that people leave to far places. She says;

> I never thought about leaving, actually. Because it's not it's not a thing where I used to grow up in Syria, like people don't travel to study, like, we used even like to grow up in the same village, married in the same village, applied to job in the same village. Like even going to another city was like something so weird, then your parents will be sad and crying if you're living like more than 10 minutes away from the house. So, it never was a plan. But it happened like suddenly.

WUSC as a Way to Freedom

The freedom that getting admitted into the WUSC program and be resettled to Canada entailed was one of the responses as to why participants applied into the WUSC program. All participants mentioned their experiences with limited rights but hoped that their getting into Canada would mean acquiring higher education and having a use for their qualifications viz-a-viz, getting employed or pursue other economic activities. The freedom of movement was something that they had only hoped for such they eagerly looked forward to experiencing it. Chimwemwe says she knew it is only by being free that she can even be able to support her family who are still in the refugee camp. She says:

> The first thing is like, freedom, being free exercising, you know, like, basically, human rights like freedom as just like a normal human being, where you're not restricted by your status of being a refugee. And another thing, it's just like, the opportunities of just being in a developed country, having like that education, having that access to like the resources, like the jobs, now you stand the chance of helping people that you're leaving

> back since we leave families. So now you, you look forward to that, having that opportunity of being in a position where you can help other people that are still back as well, as well as help yourself.

Jean-Pierre says he saw great opportunities of being selected into the WUSC program and coming to the developed country that Canada is. Apart from accessing higher education, he saw freedom and hopes of a better life than that of the refugee camp in the developing country. He says:

> I understood that there's, there's a whole lot to life than just being in a constricted place. Like yeah, I understand there's a lot more to do than just being there. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible so I can come and you know, start living a life because I felt like I've just been in a box or you know, in a container my whole life that you know, everything I do is kinda like I don't have freedom to do whatever I want this, like this, you know, it's determined by outside factors that I don't have control over. Coming to a first world country, and the first world country like Canada, that has freedom and is known for its, you know, higher education, and you know, the quality of life and everything. I had high expectations, and I'm gonna tell you right now, I wasn't disappointed. Everything that I expected came out to be true. You know, I do just, I thank God for it.

Competitiveness of the Program

All participants except one explained how difficult and competitive it is to be admitted into the WUSC – Student Refugee Program. The participants explained that, apart from the requirements to be considered into the program, the number of available slots for enrolment are just few as compared to the number of applicants that qualify for the program. As applicants are

allowed to apply as long as they are between the ages of 18 and 25, first time applicants are said to not stand a chance of being picked. Jean-Pierre says there are some students that simply give up after applying two or three times because it keeps getting competitive every passing year. He says:

> Some people give up because it's, it's, it's like, it's you like, you have to understand that there's a lot of people who apply for this opportunity, but there's only few, just few of them, get it. It's easy for someone to feel like they're not going to get in and give up. A lot of students actually apply for this program. So, like, the number accumulates, like just, just increase exponentially over time, like, over the years, the number of applicants actually increases, because you're not restricted to apply once or twice. So as long as you meet the criteria of being under 25 years of age, you can still apply. So some people start applying when they're 16, or 17. The people you're competing with this, like 1000 students, and there's like, half of them have better grades than you. people have normalized that when you're applying for the first time, there's a slim chance that you'll be taken, which is true.

Thoko discusses her experience of failing to be picked at her first attempt when she applied for the program. Even when she was picked at her second attempt, when she saw the first list of shortlisted candidates with her name on it, she still could not be excited because being on that list does not guarantee being resettled into Canada. She says:

> We always knew that there was a program, a resettlement program for refugee students but chances of being picked are also like, low, because it's not like oh, you get good grades or you're, you're chosen in the program, there are requirements criteria that they need. So, at first, when I applied in 2017, I wasn't like picked, that was like, my first time

> applying, they didn't pick me. And then I tried again my, my chances. And then I was picked in 2018. So since the first time I was left, I didn't like expect to be taken the second time. I wasn't like putting my hopes. It's a process. So, you might get all excited, because you've being picked on the first list, but they're like, two more, three more lists to be like, you know, to be considered. It's always stressful.

Concurring with Thoko, Chimwemwe says that making it on the initial list of finalists does not guarantee that you will make it to Canada. She explains that the most crucial part now comes when they have to undergo interviews with the immigration officer who comes from Canada into the refugee camp. Student refugees are asked to explain how they became refugees and what is withholding them from returning to their home countries. Applicants are therefore expected to keep to every detail that they can, otherwise they lose their chance of getting the scholarship. Chimwemwe says;

> What happens in between is that we start, like the English lessons, we take IELTS, and also we have immigration interview, where we get interviewed by the Canadian immigration in between and that is one of the crucial parts, because now you have to revisit your story. Now, it's not all about, it's not about your grades. It's not about your work ethic. It's not about how hard working you are or how you're going to be able to survive in Canada. It's not about that, it's solely about your status as a refugee. Why did you move from your country of origin? What is this, and you have to re-narrate your story or the story based on how your parents told it to you, whatever happened, even if you were not there, and that is very crucial. Because if it is, if any like small detail was different from what maybe your, your parents said, what is in your status on like your documents that could have been made prior before you had the knowledge or whatever

you said before, any slight mistake. It gets canceled. And it is it is pretty traumatic knowing like if some people maybe they had other chances of getting other scholarships, like in the country. And once you're picked for WUSC you have to pick one and you leave everything else. So now you're already in the program. You have left everything. Now you're in the hopes of like, okay, am I going to Canada next year, now I'm part of the WUSC program. And then now you go to that immigration interview and then you do it and you have to wait and then later on they be like you can't move forward.

However, one participant says that applying into the program was not as hard and competitive as the other participants explained. In her case, Shirin says that because not many students in the refugee camp where she was could not pass qualifying examinations for applying into this program, those who passed had it easy. She says:

I was one of the 20 students who passed the high school in the whole camp. Like me and my sister, and there were another 18 students, and we were the only students who passed... from about, like, I think there were 6000 students. That time my sister actually she got a scholarship to France before she got WUSC. So, she left before me even though she's younger. And for me and my friend, the other friend who applied from the Camp we got WUSC.

Meaning of Admission into the Program

The excitement that comes when one has been admitted into the WUSC program was one of the responses that the participants mostly mentioned. Because selection into the program is so competitive and hard, as above outlined, the moment refugee students learn of their being admitted into the program is seen as life changing and most defining in their lives. Jean-Pierre explains that it is from that moment that student refugees start planning their lives around Canada even though they still have a year for them to be resettled. He also says that this is a

moment where one sees a change in personal status as he or she tends to be respected and is expected to be acting responsibly before the community. He says:

> It's like someone delivering the news that you've, your life is gonna change, like, literally 100% like just upside down like that, it just leaps within, like with, with that little decision, everything just changes. From that moment on, everything about your life just changes. It's not something that just changes like, you know, like, slowly throughout the process and all that, as soon as you are on that list. Like everything changes, because you realize you stop planning your life in the place where you are now, you have to, you start planning about life in Canada and all that. And then you have to, you know, everybody starts, you know, treating you well, you know, that you'll be going to Canada, so they treat you differently. And at the same time, you also feel differently, you have high expectations, people have high expectations of you. So you have to behave differently. At the same time, you also have high expectations for yourself, at the same time for your goals and your family. Me getting that opportunity wasn't about me, it wasn't about me, it was about more than, more than just myself, it was about my family, it was about everybody else that's gonna come from me, and everybody else who's associated with me.

Chimwemwe recalls the moment she heard that she had been selected for the program. Knowing how this decision would forever transform her life, she was so emotional and could not believe it and considered it a surreal moment. She says:

> It was surreal. I couldn't believe it. It is one of those things that they tell you and you, you can't believe at that time. When I called my parents, like everybody at my house was crying because everybody like expected or like, yeah, you know, fingers crossed. It was a

very, like, surreal moment. I was super excited. Like, I was super, like grateful and thankful.

WUSC's Preparation of Students for Resettlement

All participants described how WUSC prepared them for resettlement into Canada. They all appreciated the efforts that WUSC put into ensuring that they were aware of what to expect when they come to Canada. Jean-Pierre acknowledges the work that WUSC did in preparing the students for life in Canadian. He particularly finds the orientations useful in preparing people like him who had not known any rights or freedoms as they enter into a country that gives them the same for the very first time in their lives. He says:

> They'd actually prepare us for life in Canada, so they did an amazing job, because we'd actually have like, a lot of workshops, like weekly classes as if you're taking a course. You would actually graduate from that class, because it's, you know, preparing life in Canada for you, like, you prepare everything, you know, starting from, you know, the way people interact, you know, the food that people eat, travel, you cover every topic there is... university how you're going to interact, because obviously, everybody who's in there is a student, so they're going to be on campus, you know, so you have to prepare them on how they're going to interact with other students because they'll be first year, and they're coming from a different world. And, you know, they're coming to Canada. So, you know, they have to know how to integrate with other students. So WUSC did a great job in preparing me and other students for life in Canada, and it was great. It paid off. They try their best, and they actually try to, you know, try to relate to us in a, I'll try to put myself in the shoes, like back in the day, they will try to, you know, relate to us, and basically tell us everything that's different, like, what's the difference between Canada

> and Malawi, and what we expect, and you know, how to, you know, to conduct yourself, among the Canadians and how to, you know, if you treat yourself like in the Canadian culture, there's a lot of differences that, you know, when it comes to culture, and everything else that you do not, you, like, I did not know, because I thought, I know, I knew everything from movies and all that. But then as soon as you know, they start talking like that, then you realize, oh, okay, that's different, that's different, you know, because I grew up in a country whereby there's not really freedom, you know, and when you come this side, everybody has their own freedom, they have the right to say whatever, they want to have the right to live their life, whatever, however they want.

John Bosco appreciates the fact that the orientations are done by student volunteers who understand what it means to be a student in Canada. He says:

> I think WUSC is doing a really great job. In the sense that those who come to teach us are not like professors or other people from the offices, they are students themselves and they teach people who are going to become students. So, they are sharing the experience. Whatever they are sharing, it's the same thing they passed through as students. Although in the cultural background, it's different.

To the prospective refugee students, Thoko tells them to be prepared for the realities of life in Canada despite the orientation that they are given. About the WUSC preparations, she says:

> They just give you like, a general picture of what you're going to expect or how you're going to live for, yeah, such kind of things. But you face the reality when you're here like when you, you in Canada for us students, we just have to be ready. They can prepare you,

> but you also have to prepare yourself to live in a new environment and accept the new realities.

However, participants also expressed how they wish there were more topics that WUSC needed to include in the pre-departure orientation. With the switching of classes from in-person to online, participants said they struggled to adapt very fast because they lacked technological knowledge. Chimwemwe therefore looks back and says the orientation was not enough and wishes there should be some computer lessons. She says:

> I would say, it's not enough for sure, just a couple months and there's no way you can learn about everything. And just like that month, some of the things you just really need to be in the environment to be able to, like comprehend it and just be part of it, I guess. But it's, it's definitely not, not adequate. And if I was to suggest, like, maybe like improvements I'd, maybe just say, maybe including, like giving like computer lessons considering how here, everything is like, maybe because of COVID now everything is online, but still, people use like here use technology a lot. And it's something that we didn't have access to. So, we really don't know the basic things like even using Word, even searching for whatever you need. Information is just there online, but you just don't even know how to locate it like reading that PowerPoint... It's just basic things that are really everybody here knows, but you really don't know like, we don't know them and now we are considered like university students.

John-Pierre, while appreciating the efforts that WUSC put in preparing student refugees for life in Canada, also wishes the issue of mental health was discussed at length before they could depart for Canada. He says in the refugee camp, the issue of mental health is taken lightly, and students find life to be hard when they come to Canada due to its demands. He says:

I think some of the things that I wish I would have known, I think this is, this is an issue that's taken, that's taken, like it's not taken seriously back home..., it's an issue of mental health. Here, life is so hectic and it's so like, quick like that. And being someone else who's coming here alone as a student, you're, you're, you're more likely to become a victim of that, to become prone to for mental illness... your mental health is not always like, you're not always healthy. And it can really affect a lot of things in your life. It's something that's taken lightly, but then if not, if not managed well, it can affect a lot that you can't see, because a lot of people choose to ignore it, but then I've seen it, I've seen it, I've seen it affect a lot of people, that they don't even realize that it's mental health that's causing everything, because something that you ignore, but then affects all the other aspects of your life. Uni is hard, nobody said it was easy, you know, but then the feeling of being lonely, not having your family close to you not having community to support you. And, you know, the feeling of feeling like, you know, you've been through hell already, so you know, what else could go wrong. And that's why a lot of people actually, you know, come crumbling down, you know, some people drop out of school, some people leave literally like, you know, just paying rent and having food, and then they have nothing else, they're hopeless. I've seen a lot of friends even close to me become like that, you know, because they do not know how to cope with their mental, you know, with their mental health and how to deal with everything that has been thrown at them. Because back home it's like, you know, you have your family to support you, at the same time you're used to the culture, you're used to the environment that you live in you know, how to navigate and everything... just being thrown in the new environment. And you don't even have time to actually adapt because you go to Uni straight up. Because even,

even students who grew up here, people who grew up here, when they go to Uni they even have a hard time, they have the time trying to cope up, keep up with everything. And now imagine you, you're trying to keep up with class in school. At the same time, also try and keep up with that, you know, everything that's off campus, the community and everything, then life together, you know, and at the same time, bearing in mind that your family's somewhere you wouldn't want them to be, you wouldn't want them to be, you know, somewhere where you, you know, as much as you're celebrating that you're out of that life, and you're somewhere better now. But you still have a family that you care about somebody that you love, still out there. So, it affects a lot, mentally affects you a lot. And when, when you're, when mentally you are, you know, well, it affects everything, like physically, like every aspect of your life is affected. Because you're not well, mentally. So I think, you know, before I came to Canada, I think I wish someone had actually prepared me to actually have to know how to deal with these things, when they come, you know, how not to know how to preserve my mental health, to know how to always keep it 100, you know, just, you know, just be able to, you know, to know how to deal with, you know, to cope with anxiety and the feeling of loneliness, and you know, how to use the, you know, the resources that I have in the community that I'm being provided and all that. Because some people when they're going through something like that just shut down, they just shut out everything, everybody, everything, just shut them out. And then they remain in their own world. And this can lead to a lot of things. I'm glad that no one that I know who is close to me has committed suicide. But it's something that you see that they commit like slow suicide, because if you go into drugs and abusing substances, like that's just slow, you just killing yourself slowly. So, I wish someone

> actually prepared me for that. It's an issue that, you know, telling someone back home they'll be like, what are you talking about, because mental health is not really such a serious issue, where I come from, you know, but you know, it's a, it's an issue, now that I'm here and, you know, actually see through, like, every day.

Jean-Pierre states that coming to Canada as a student while not accompanied, and the many demands that life itself pose on them exposes students to mental health challenges. He argues that, while students faced challenges while they were in the refugee camp back home, they had established support that they could run to and their coming to Canada disconnected them from such readily available support in the face of challenges. He stresses that the predeparture orientation by WUSC does not prepare students for the reality of mental health challenges that they are likely to face and the need to seek healthy solutions to the same.

Theme 3: Students from Refugee Backgrounds' Experiences in Canada

As all participants came to Canada from refugee camps where they were in countries which did not grant them any rights or protections, they shared similar experiences upon their being in Canada. While one had lived in her home country up until the age of fifteen and had at least experienced rights and liberties, the other five participants either left their home countries as babies and could not recollect anything or were born in transit as their parents fled the conflicts in their home countries. Their coming into Canada therefore offers them similar experiences in relation to how they navigate both academic and social lives. All participants very much connect their background as refugees when explaining their experiences in Canada. They therefore have both positive and negative experiences in Canada. Six subthemes therefore emerged from the interviews: (1) Language difficulties (2) Academic challenges (3) Family

responsibilities (4) Loneliness and homesickness (5) lack of sense of belonging (6) Sources of support.

Language Difficulties

All the participants expressed difficulties in understanding English which is the medium of instruction in their universities. As they came from countries where English is the second language, they found that it was difficult for them to understand their professors' accent. Thoko says:

> From my first day when I got here in first year, that was the time of transitioning from, you know, back home, the education system from back home and joining the new system, which I found here. So, I could say that it wasn't easy, it was a struggle to be able to understand each and every word that the prof was saying, the professor was saying, because of the accent, and, our accent back home, they just like, completely, two different like things. It wasn't easy.

Shirin also shares similar sentiments as she says:

It's so hard to start like a university in Canada if your, if your like, basic study was like in, like Middle East or in a different country because we didn't speak English when we were studying my high school.

For the participants, coming to Canada to learn in universities where English is a language of instruction affected how they understood the lectures and participated in their learning. Not only was English their second language, but also the differences in the accents between them and the Canadians posed a great challenge to their learning.

Academic Challenges

From their responses, all participants indicated that they face difficulties in their academics owing to their background as refugees. All participants indicated they noticed that most of the things that they struggled with in class was due to the lack of a good foundation in their secondary education which they did in underfunded and crowded schools in refugee camps. Jean-Pierre discusses how it was hard for him to comprehend First year Math unlike his peers who had done High School in the USA or Canada. His peers usually wondered how he was finding pre-calculus so hard when it is something that should have been learnt in High School. Jean-Pierre says;

> When it comes to education, you know, I feel like I could have had a fair chance of competing with students who grew up in the same environment that I did. I faced a lot of challenges in order to keep up. I remember some of the first classes that I took my first semester I did not really do well, because some of the things that I learned from my high school, I'd find the profs explain the same thing in class, but then it's just way more sophisticated. I was like, wow, this is, this is a lot. This feels like Uni. This feels like Uni, but then someone that someone in the same class will tell you like, yeah, I remember doing this. I remember doing this in High School. This is easy for me. You know, it's, I remember doing this in high school. And, you know, a lot of students who came here through WUSC, they face that struggle, because a lot of us are from third world countries, and education is not, it's not that great. Some of my friends who I was taking the same classes as in first year, they had already done calculus and had already done calculus in High School. Calculus One, and Calculus Two, you know, someone had already done pre-calculus. And now the Math I did, I don't really think like it's that level, you know what I mean? So, I find myself doing a lot of work, I had to do double the

> work that other students are doing just to keep up and not, not even to come out on top, but no, I'd actually be the average, while having done the, you know, double the work that they did. Why...? They went to the best schools in the world, it's a simple explanation. They went to the best schools in their country. And in my, the school that I went to, I went to the school that I could afford, I don't think it was even the best school in the country. And the prof will put you guys in the same category. You know, so you understand that them, they had, they had a lot of work, a lot of like, you know, background, a lot of the foundation was laid in High School.

Jean-Pierre strongly ties his academic experiences to his refugee background where the kind of education he received affects how he performs in some courses. He believes that he could have been understanding lectures and performing in his studies differently if he had acquired a better High School education like most of his peers who did theirs in developed countries.

For Shirin, transitioning into higher education in a different country was a challenge as she came from a refugee camp, and had limited knowledge of university life. She says:

> For a student who was coming from a refugee camp, I didn't know most of the things or, I didn't know how to cope with university life. And to add on that, being an independent student, I needed help from all angles that I could reach out to. Some of the courses that I was enrolled in, in the first year, I had no clue. I didn't know the courses, the courses that I just found in university. We didn't grow up learning how to write like research or how to do like an assignment like we don't have that, we just like study, have an exam and that's it, that's how I used to work all my life.

For students like Shirin, the differences in pedagogy further complicated the challenge of transitioning into higher education in a country where learning is student centered, with regular performance assessments unlike the education system where she grew up in.

Family Responsibilities

The family responsibilities that the participants bear for their families back in the refugee camps was a common response as one of the experiences that they undergo as they are in Canada. The participants explained how they bear financial as well as familial responsibilities even at moments when they themselves need some support. While also facing financial challenges of their own, participants explained how they find themselves being required to provide financial support to their families that are living lives in harsh conditions in the refugee camps. Chimwemwe narrates how this usually affects her mentally when her family needs support, but she is herself going through financial hardships and not able to support them. She says:

> It is so hard going through financial issues, and you don't really have anybody to call and be like, oh, can you help me with this? And in turn, sometimes you find, I find myself that I'm the one who they'll actually be calling on be like, yo, this is happening. And it weighs on me, it weighs on us and I'm not only like speaking for myself, this is something that we share among so many people when we're talking. We carry our families' responsibilities on our heads most of the times, even if you're not supporting them financially, which you usually do, but mentally as well. If they're going through something, you're the one they're going to call and now here you have your life you have a school, so you really You don't have support now you're in a position to be supporting your whole family as well. So that is hard. And knowing that they actually in the

> circumstance, they are still refugees, they're still facing discrimination, they are still living in uncertainty, it, it is still so hard.

Jean-Pierre shares similar experiences where despite their being financially unstable themselves, these refugee students have financial responsibilities for their families back home which puts a toll on their studies as well as their mental health. As the students are usually the only hope to their families, they know that there is nothing else that they can do except find a way to support their families. It is often a burden whenever they imagine the conditions that their families may be going through at that moment. He says:

> I'm not stable myself; you know, you can't really be able to help your family. Especially when you're the only one out here, it's like, it's really hard. You get in a position whereby now everybody's looking up to you, you know, and when everybody's looking up to you now, not only do you present hope to them, but then at the same time, you also have to, you know, to help them presently, you know, you're the future and the present, you know, you have to help them presently... So, you have to be ready for anything, you know, one day, you know, your sibling can get very sick. And they need medical care, you know, the medical care is not really that great you have to do your best, so that they can get out of the camp, and then go to private hospitals, so they can get treated, or your mom gets, you know, very sick and they need help, you know, you know, it's not, you don't, it affects you, even mentally, I mean, you know, psychologically, because you instead of focusing on school, and things that brought you here, you're wondering whether you know, your family actually had dinner or not.

John Bosco explains how the need to support his family makes him to sometimes consider quitting school and simply be working to raise money and provide for them.

Nevertheless, he says he still decides to continue with school as he knows that in no time he will be finished with school and start working. He says:

> Sometimes you might say, why should I spend four years in school while my family is suffering? Why can't I just abandon school and take up the jobs and work and then send money home? You might say, say that, but that's a short-term goal. So, it's just a matter of choice to think that what is really best for one person, school or working. But at the end, it's school, cause you, you're going to spend four years in school, you graduate, then you can do the other stuff later on.

Loneliness and Homesickness

Participants reported feeling lonely and being homesick at particular moments while in Canada. They explained that, because they were resettled without any members of their immediate families, they find life hard as they lack socio-emotional support which they could get from their immediate family members during holiday times. They explained that, for example, holidays are a big thing in Canada so much so that they feel lonely and homesick when their Canadian student friends go for holidays, and they remain in their university towns without anywhere to go or any family to look up to. Participants explain that loneliness makes their studies to be hard as they lack support. Chimwemwe says:

> It is hard. And it definitely hits during holiday season. I don't always talk about it. Because people here celebrate holiday season a lot, and it's family time. And then the friends that you had made now have gone to their families. So, if you didn't get invited, probably with like, with a certain family, that means that is the time that you actually are, actually alone, even though you had like support around you. And now you are thinking of your family, that you could have been celebrating with your family.

Jean-Pierre explains that it is mostly when they remember the living conditions that their families are still in back in refugee camps that makes them feel hurt and lonely. He further states that loneliness and a lack of family support compounds the difficulty of university. He says:

> Uni is hard, nobody said it was easy, you know, but then, the feeling of being lonely, not having your family close to you, not having community to support you. There's no single day that passes without me thinking of them. I'm gonna be honest with you. I think everybody who came here, and they don't have the family here, they're affected in one way or the other. Because at least I came here when I was, when I was 21. And, you know, I've been here for, you know, for just over three years. And, you know, it's, it's a lot when you when you think about them, and it's not, it's not even about missing them, and, you know, wanting to be with them, of course, everybody wants to be around their family and all that. But the fact that, you know, you remember the conditions that you were living at the, you know, the life that you had there and then, you know, in your mind that, you know, that's it, that's a life that live every day, you know, it hurts you it hurts, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Some participants explained how loneliness and homesickness made them feel stressed, ending up simply crying for missing their families. Thoko says:

> If you're alone, it's much stressing, you find yourself crying most of the time, you're like, oh, I miss home, oh I miss this. It affects me because so as I mentioned, she's (her mother), she's, she's home alone. Like, she's 64, 65, she'll be turning 65 soon. So, imagining that she's growing old, and she doesn't have like, any child, that's helping her.

Participants expressed that the lack of a community of support subjects them to high levels of loneliness and homesickness. While not having their families with them around causes

them to be stressed, their concerns for the situations that their families are in back home keeps them daily guessing what they might be going through which keeps them stressing.

Lack of Sense of Belonging

Lacking a sense of belonging was one of the responses that the participants also mostly mentioned. There were various reasons that the participants gave that they said make them still feel as not belonging to Canada. Most participants stated that they still feel as not belonging to Canada because their families are still in refugee camps, and they never cease to think about them every passing day. They also said that having moved from refugee camps in developing countries where life was not as advanced as it is it Canada, adapting to life in Canada was hard as they feel like they are behind on so many levels. Chimwemwe says:

> It is pretty hard, it was for me, and one of the things that I struggled with is just like, feeling like you don't really fit in and struggling with, with feeling whether like you actually belong, or you don't, because we are behind as somebody who, with like a refugee background, and like somebody who was like living in a refugee camp, or, like, having a background that I had, you are, we are behind on so many levels, the way we think, the way we see things, our intellect as I already... like, we are doing our classes online, and you don't know the basic things that you're supposed to know, as a university student.

Shirin says she feels not entirely belonging to Canada due to her background of being from the Middle East, Muslim, and Syrian. She says, because of the stereotypes that people with her background face in Canada, she is made to be very careful in her speech and actions. She lives in fear of the attacks that Muslims face, yet she knows she cannot help the situation. She

therefore feels having a weaker position within the Canadian society thus, not feeling fully belonging. She says:

> Sometimes they are so worried and watch what they speak like carefully. They are like sometimes also not that open. For me like I think coming from a background as a refugee it makes you a little bit weaker in the community. And makes you also almost feel like you're in a position responsible about your action more than anyone. Like for me because I came like from, there's three things like, I'm from Middle East, I'm a Muslim, and I am Syrian. So, I feel I am like represent these three in the same time. So, I'm so careful, like with what I'm saying, and I feel responsible, like to any small act I do like in this country. The hardest thing for me right now is being a Muslim. Every morning, I watch the news, and I see all the people and everything they say about Muslims. It just makes me like, struggle. I know many people are kind here like in Canada, most people are kind but still, like, just yesterday, there was like, like, stranger who shoot like Muslim leaving them there after the prayer, like, and that's happened like in Toronto. It's even close like, for me. That's one thing like, makes me worry, always and makes me feel sad. When you're already judged by many people, for many things. It's not even close or represent you. I think being Syrian, is more like I feel responsible about that, in this school and the community because I wanted like people to support more refugees.

For Shirin, it is the burden of justifying to the Canadians that she is not like “any other” Muslim who can be prejudiced against. She feels often wrongly judged for her Islamic faith which is contrary to who and what she is. This makes her not feeling fully belonging to a country that has a people that are known for their kindness.

Sources of Support

The participants discussed the various sources of support in the face of some challenging experiences that they encounter. All participants mentioned various sources of support that they used to cope with the daily challenges in both their personal and academic lives. In their academics, most participants mentioned that they found technology to be helpful in dealing with challenges that they face in class. All participants also mentioned that there were resources on campuses for their academic support but said that they did not find them very useful to their refugee background situation. For some participants, the internet provided much needed resources for their academic support, while peers were mentioned as reliable when it came to providing personal support. In order to fully understand the lectures, some participants used YouTube videos. Jean-Pierre says:

> I'd find support on YouTube. If I don't get what the Prof is saying, I had to watch, like, you know, a couple of videos, like, you know, two or three videos of the same topic, just to understand... and this would be YouTube or any other, you know, online resource that I could use to be able to understand you know, so I would say that I went mostly on the internet. Of course, there's resources on the campus. And, you know, you can go to the office hours of your prof, and all that. But, like I said, the education system here is different from back home. And the way they explain things is different. So sometimes I would actually go to these office hours; someone will explain things to me, but then you know, subconsciously they explain, they're treating me the same way they'll treat someone else who went to school here, they don't know my situation, you know, they don't know where I'm coming from. So, if someone doesn't know where you're coming from, they can't really help you. You know what I mean? So, like, you're not going to

> start explaining to this person that Oh, so this is how I approach problems in high school. And this is what I did... So, what I did, how can you help me know, you know, as soon as you find that the methods are not really helping you... there's a ton of resources online that can help you.

Thoko appreciated the understanding of her professors when she asked them to allow her to be recording the lectures so that she could replay them later. When the COVID-19 hit, she found the switching from in-person to online learning very helpful as it meant listening to the lectures at her own pace which helped her. She also found a community of students from refugee backgrounds who shared similar experiences and supported each other. She says:

> For me to adjust or to adapt, I had to come up with strategies to be able to, you know, complete my studies or to be able to do my assignments on time, or be able to revise my notes on my own. So, there's this strategy of recording in class if you're in a lecture room. And you, you have talked to your prof you're like, okay, I'm having struggles to understand each and everything that you're saying, but please, can I record this lecture, and maybe do revisions later using the same recording? So, that was like in 2019, before the COVID thing happened. So, it was like in-person, at least now you do online, you pause when you want to pause, you know, so professors were so nice, they would allow you to record the lectures. And when you go back home, you do your revisions at the speed that you like. So, adjusting is never a simple or easy step. But then with time, you get to learn how to survive or how to do things. You also like copy from what other people are doing where you make friends, and they teach you. There are always chances that to a school you are going to, there are students that came from your country or elsewhere, that are there, that are also doing the same program. So that's like one, one

> means of support that you can get approaching those students. And they'll tell you how the experiences were in the first year. That's how I actually managed to cope with the challenges in the first year talking to those, my fellow students, it's always easy to link up because you share the same background, or you understand the same struggles. So, they like help you to, to find solutions to certain problems, it could be something that they pass through. And apart from that the schools always have programs and academic advisors that you go to. And I found that helpful, because for a student who was coming from a refugee camp, I didn't know most of the things or I didn't know how to cope with university life. And to add on that being an independent student, I needed help from all angles that I could reach out to. So, I would say my academic advisors were very helpful. You know, so, those are like my, my support systems.

While academic advisors and other support services were available at universities, some students found it hard to approach them and ask for any support. Some participants explained that their refugee background made them feel undeserving of asking for more help as, comparably, they were better off and felt they simply needed to be grateful for being in Canada otherwise they could have been in a refugee camp struggling with life. They also tied their attitude towards asking for support to their background where they grew up in an environment where they were not encouraged to ask questions or seek help from strangers. Chimwemwe says:

> We have those resources, for sure. But personally, I still face like issues with accessing those resources. I really don't know why. I would rather be with my friends and just ask them. I feel more comfortable than actually like, going and then talking about myself what I'm going through. I feel like it still takes a lot for you to actually be able to get out of that zone that I'm used to of just like being closed up and being expected to like, you

know, handle it on your own and just figure it out. And sometimes life here is so good that it is like a drastic change. So now it's like a huge jump. Now you're like, okay, I was on ground zero... so, if I actually jumped, now I'm on a 10. It's drastic, and it somehow doesn't even feel okay. So, I'm like, okay, now I'm at five... don't I just feel grateful? So now you're like, I feel like I'm in between, like, okay, you're supposed to even be grateful now that you even have this. How would you be like, go up and do like, okay, now you take now you're taking too much, but like, that's what I deserve. And that's what I have at my disposal. But I still feel some kind of like, hold back when it comes to accessing them. So, you're at a disadvantage compared to other people. Maybe we come from a background where you're supposed to know what you're doing. And sometimes asking questions makes you look like you're stupid. So, you still have that mindset as well, where you're, like, scared of asking questions, because you see that you're the only one who actually doesn't know. And you're definitely like, behind. So I feel like struggling with identity and struggling with not having support as well. People here have support, they know where to go and find the support that they need. And they know how to demand it, they know how to ask for it because they know what they deserve. So, coming from somebody who's a refugee, you don't have those rights, you know, nobody owes you anything. So, you are used to not even demanding what you deserve. Because you basically don't have the rights. You don't deserve anything. So even now that you actually have access to those resources, you sometimes even feel scared to go and actually demand and be like okay, like you're supposed to help me with like this assignment. And that is driven like not having the support like as well as family like, you don't have like your friends here. You don't have your family here. So, you still don't have that support

> as well. So that is a huge disadvantage. I still struggle that I, I feel like I sometimes I just feel like I still need assurance to actually be like, okay, is it, is it actually okay to, for me to be even like, asking this? Is it okay for me to even like be demanding this? Sometimes I still struggle with that because you're used to feeling like you don't deserve it. Like, what are you like, you don't deserve it... so sometimes it's like, it's part of who you are. But it, I think it takes time. And it's still like a learning process. And I'm still I'm still coping how to say if I'm being honest.

For those students that have a four-year scholarship and maintain contact with WUSC office, they stated that they find support readily available. Calvin mentioned that there were many options that were available that one could choose from. He says:

> There are plenty of support resources on campus. Like on campus, you can go to our WUSC office, office will help you out you know, just explain what you're doing and they'll help you out, they'll give you resources. They'll help you out, they'll give you options, and different opportunities that you might choose for yourself.

The experiences that participants reported included the language difficulties and academic challenges that they face in class as they find it hard to understand the accent of their professors as well as grasp what is being taught owing to the different pedagogies employed in the schools where they came from and the universities where they are right now as well as the difficulty of the content being taught. Most participants also mentioned the responsibilities that they bear even as students to their families who are in refugee camps in their countries of first asylum. As they are seen to be better off making some money in Canada, the participants said they are expected to make financial contributions to their families and, knowing the conditions that their families are indeed

going through, they are left with no choice but to find ways to make money and support them which greatly affects their studies as well. Most participants also discussed how lonely and homesick they feel while in Canada as they were resettled alone. They said it is mostly during holidays that they feel the pain of being away from their families. Most participants explained that they do not have a sense of belonging to Canada due to some stereotypes that they have to endure every day or due to the fact their families are still in another country in a refugee camp. Participants also mentioned the various sources of support that they use in the face of the challenges that they encounter which mostly impact on their academics. This leads to the fourth theme on how WUSC supports these students in Canada in light of these experiences.

Theme 4: WUSC Support in Canada

All participants discussed how they receive support from WUSC when they are in Canada. The participants mentioned that there are local committees that are established in universities to welcome and provide support to student refugees as they arrive from countries of first asylum. Participants also discussed the differences in the scholarships that WUSC provides them with. They also discussed how they transition from being offered financial support by WUSC to fending for themselves for their tuition and related costs of college attendance. Two subthemes therefore emerged from this which include: differences in WUSC scholarships and local WUSC committees' support to refugee students.

Differences in WUSC Scholarships

The participants explained that there are differences in the amounts of financial support that WUSC provides them with while they are in Canada. The participants indicated that they receive financial support differently based on the university where they are admitted. They

indicated that some universities provide better financial offers unlike other universities based on factors that they themselves are not aware of. Participants indicated that the types of scholarships that the universities provide usually vary from only providing a one-year scholarship, to others providing a four-year full funding. WUSC is therefore involved in helping the students secure admission into these universities and entry into Canada as scholarship packages are determined by the universities. Jean-Pierre says:

> Some universities it's like, you know, they only sponsor in the first year, which is my case, they sponsor you the first year, and then after that, you know, you might, you know, you, you have to take care of yourself, you know, and that's where the trouble comes. Unfortunately, for me, like I said, my, my sponsorship was only one year, so there's no, there's no more help... that was just one year, and then that's it, yeah, that's it. I have two other friends who we came together, were the same cohort when we came from Malawi. These guys the whole Uni and the accommodation, like they stay in Res (Residence Hall), and they are being paid for four years of university, or however long your program is going to take.

Chimwemwe was given a two-year sponsorship by her university which meant the need for her to fend for herself in her third year. At the end of the two-year scholarship, she moved from the on-campus accommodation and got her own off-campus housing. To get money for her tuition, Chimwemwe had to apply for a student loan and looked for jobs for her upkeep. Chimwemwe says:

> For me, the University supports like those students for two years. That two years just include tuition, a monthly stipend of like 300 Canadian dollars, just to cover like, like... paying your phone bill. And after those two years, then you're on your own. As I am right

> now, like you have to move off-campus and you just basically like start life on your own. And then I get, then I start applying for student loans to just like pay for my tuition, the remaining part and then and then I guess, working in between to just like support yourself, because you're no longer like getting that money or anything.

For those participants that were given a one- or two-year scholarship, they said they never heard anything else or received any other forms of support from WUSC at the end of the scholarship period. This is said to have an impact on how they adjusted to life as they sought to provide for themselves. Some of the participants opted to distance themselves from the activities of the WUSC clubs which are the local committees running the WUSC – Student Refugee Program in the university campuses, as they needed to work and raise money for their tuition and upkeep. Jean-Pierre says:

> I can't say that I really received any support, you know, either, financial support, mental support, you know, like, emotional. Support can range, can be various, a lot of things, but then none of those things that I actually get support from WUSC. After the first year of my sponsorship, I distanced myself, because I have to be able to pay my own tuition, you know, and to be able to support myself and to be able to do that, I have to be able to work, you know, and if I'm working, I, you know, obviously, I'll have limited time to actually be able to interact with a lot of people and going to the club, and being more engaged with the club.

One participant who received a four-year scholarship indicated that the WUSC office regularly checks up on him to hear of his progress. He maintained that the WUSC office does not stop supporting a student unless the student stops reaching out to them. Calvin says:

> WUSC does not stop supporting you, unless you stop contacting them. You know, they're always there to support whenever you reach out. They do reach out once in a month to know how I'm doing and to keep up you know, like let me keep them in touch of how I'm doing and progressing my academics and, yea, actually WUSC does not stop helping you unless you stop contacting them or reaching out to them.

Local WUSC Committees' Support to Refugee Students

Participants explained that once they arrive on campus in Canada, they are left in the hands of WUSC local committees. These are student led committees that were established in the universities to support refugee students in the WUSC – Student Refugee Program. It is through WUSC committees that participants indicated that they get psychosocial support. These committees are said to be providing safe space to students as they settle down in Canada. However, not all universities have well-coordinated committees to support students, which makes some refugee students lack the much-needed support as they figure out life on campus as soon as they arrive. Chimwemwe says:

> Once you get into Canada, it's not about WUSC anymore. It's about the committee that is there that is supposed to be supporting you. There is a local committee that prepares for you before you arrive. And then when you arrive, they help you get like, set up, let's say like a bank account, like getting all your documents together, like navigating your courses, like maybe giving you a tour of the campus and just like, showing you around some of the basic things that you need to know and just being there in case you have any questions. And that might vary from like, university to university. Some of the universities, their local committees are pretty strong, and they are coordinated that a student really like feels supported, while for other like universities it might not be the

> same. And sometimes you might find that you're on your own, and you're figuring out things on your own. But when you have that committee that is strong, that way you really, you feel understood, because they already know about you where you're coming from, and it is a safe space for you to like ask questions and take time to adjust. But if you're on your own, then I guess you just feel lost.

According to the participants, these local committees are seen to be complementing the efforts that WUSC undertakes as they help students with post-arrival information in Canada. These local committees support students to get accustomed to the campus life and how to live in Canada. Participants said they find the local committees very useful as they help them with practical aspects of understanding life in Canada. John Bosco says:

> Once we arrive in Canada, we are not just left on the, on the on the university. I know it varies from one school to another. You go to the other school, you meet students. So, the WUSC, the whole WUSC program is usually run by students. So, once you arrive at a university, you meet the local committee members, those are students too. So, it's run by students and those students they'll help you to adapt whatever information which you didn't get through the preparation in the resettlement country. You will get the information from the student who will be mentoring you. They help you adapt, to get used to Canada. So, I would call it like when we are in the camp, it's more of theory, or more of the class. Once we come to Canada, it's more of practical. You get the reality, you meet the people, they show you how to take a bus. This is how you, you take a bus, this is how you go to a mall.

The participants mentioned that the support that they receive from WUSC includes the different scholarships that they are given by the universities and the different levels of support

that they continue to receive from the WUSC office. Participants also mentioned that they continue to relate differently with WUSC due to the levels of support that they receive from WUSC. Some participants mentioned that they do not receive any other support after the end of their scholarship period while others said they still receive support from WUSC as they were still receiving funding from them. Because of the various challenges that they face, participants indicated that there are various sources where they get support from. As the WUSC – Student Refugee Program also includes resettling the students, the students settling into the Canadian society also brings with it various experiences that they deal with every passing day.

Theme 5: Resettlement and Life in Canada

Participants mentioned how resettlement has impacted their individual lives. Being taken from refugee camps where they were living in a constricted environment and brought into a society where there are no restrictions on their liberties, saw a new start to life for all the participants and they explained different experiences that this has had on them. Three subthemes emerged from this theme which are perceptions of Canada, personal growth and development, and rights and freedoms.

Perceptions of Canada

All participants discussed how welcoming and friendly Canadians are. Participants said they see Canada as a great country and appreciate the diversity that is observed within the Canadian society which makes it easier for people like them to feel understood and welcomed in the country. With the large number of immigrants in the cities, their shared background makes it easy for them to easily relate. Jean-Pierre says:

Canada is a great country, and one of the things that I've been able to enjoy, you know, is

the diversity that can't go unmentioned, like the diversity that's here is, is way, you know, it's way, way different in a way that the people that are here, most of them migrated just couple years ago, you know, and you're able to share the same experiences as these people. There's a lot of Chinese immigrants, you know, a lot of Indian like Asia in general, but mainly from you know, from India, and China, and Philippines, you know, so in that order, so there's, you know, there's not a lot of, you know, like people from Africa, but then at the same time, there's a lot of people from third world countries who migrated here, so now you, you just like, it's so the whole city is like, you know, the immigrants, sometimes we feel that way, although it's not that way. And everybody is able to relate to you, because they, at some point in their life growing up, or where they are now, you know, or where they've been, they've encountered someone else who's been in your shoes, you know, so some people would actually be able to understand you. So, when it comes to the reception that we get, you know, as students who come from refugee background, it's really, it's they're very accepting, like, you know, they, they guarantee you that, you know, once you've stayed within five years, if you stay three years, consecutive in the country, you can be able to apply for citizenship, and you'll get it.

With the guarantee of being granted a citizenship, some participants expressed appreciation of how Canada is committed to helping refugees find a better life. Having been resettled in a program that is supported by the Canadian government itself, participants saw this as an expression of the welcoming nature of the Canadian people. Thoko mentioned how Canadians always make sure that people like her feel welcome in the country. She says:

I feel like we're accepted because if they even have a program, a whole program set like

> to welcome refugee students, or to help refugee students come here and do their university studies, it is because they're welcoming, and they're ready to help them change their lives, status or change their lives for the better. I feel like we are more accepted, because even when you come here, people are really nice... they're always welcoming. They welcome you; they help you settle. They help you get used to the environment. And yeah, get used to the country. So I would say we're accepted. All right, but yeah, it doesn't mean that you won't face some challenges, but it's not specifically cuz you're a refugee student. If it's racism everybody's facing that.

Calvin reported that he came to feel that he is a black person due to the racism and discrimination that he encountered when he had just arrived in Canada. He says:

> The first few months are kind of challenging, you know, respond, types of discrimination, all these kinds of racism type of thing. You know, I never felt black until I came to Canada. I never felt like that... so this kind of thing and you have all these kinds of you know, traumatic events that you pass through. And again, you're expecting to be safe and calm, and you know, just passing through different things.

However, another participant lamented the high levels of individualism that is prevalent in Canadian society which is contrary to the collectivism she grew up with in her country and refugee camp. She says:

> The least thing I don't like about Canada is like people more like live as individuals... yeah, I miss like the familism... or like the group life like when you always hang out and you visit your friend anytime. Here, it's not like you can, like, easily go knock the door on your neighbors and have coffee in the morning, no! Like, you have to call, make an

appointment and maybe you can go like after two months. There's more like individualism here so that's one thing I don't like for now.

Personal Growth and Development

Participants mentioned that their being resettled to Canada has immensely contributed to their personal growth and a change in their perspective of life. As coming to Canada has given them a university education and exposure to a developed life, participants said they are able to tell the transformation that they have undergone as they compare with how they looked at life while they were in a refugee camp. They credit this to their being resettled as they say they still notice that their friends that are in the refugee camps still have a very limited view of life as they were while still in camps. Jean-Pierre says:

> I've really grown a lot. And being in that environment at Uni, is one of the things that have been, has enabled me to actually grow like that, you know, as a person, as a student, and, you know, everything coming together, which will help me, you know, in the future, or even now, it's even helping me. It has positively changed my life. You realize the way you think, and the way you approach life is way more different, you know, than your friends that you actually were staying in the same environment back home... we just have a different way of looking at life, you know, and I, I give all these to me being able to be resettled here, because I was able to actually see people from all walks of life, and having had that experience of being in a third world country in a refugee camp, and then coming here to campus in the first world country, whereby I have, I'm exposed to everything, you know, everything. So being able to also have that exposure has also helped me to grow as a person, you know, and having gone to university has, has enabled me to actually you know, widen the horizons of my thoughts, you know, as a young person, and the way I

> approach life is different now. And the way I see things, and the way I solve problems, is a somewhat different approach. So, I'll give attributes that, like, everything was possible, because of me, you know, being able to be resettled, and come to Canada. I give credit to me being able to come to Uni, being in Uni, and studying and, you know, being resettled in Canada of generally.

For another participant, resettlement has meant growing into being independent. With the scholarship given to come to Canada without anyone else that she could look up to, Thoko learnt to be independent and live on her own. She says:

> The resettlement program taught me to be independent. I need to do everything on my own, I need to know how to survive on my own. So, the resettlement was a way it gave me an opportunity to first attend my tertiary education university, which my parents couldn't afford. So, it was like an opening door to opportunities, also showed me that I could be able to live on my own. So, it gave me that kind of a feeling of independence.

For Chimwemwe, growth meant finding employment, which was something different that people of her age could do back in the refugee camp. However, her having a refugee background greatly affected her chances for better competing in the job market with her peers who have grown up in Canada and have built resumes unlike her. She says:

> We still have to struggle having a refugee like background. Now, if I'm coming to Canada, and I'm already like 23, or 22, some other like young Canadians have already build up their profile like their resumes, they have had so many like work experiences. Now... you are going to struggle trying to find like, if you are trying to like find a job, if you are trying to apply for this, like you're still not even though the society knowing that we get so many people from so many countries, this is like a multi-cultural like country,

> it still really like doesn't play a factor, you still have to play catch up, and literally, still struggle your way up, like the hierarchy to actually be able to, like catch up, which is really hard and close to impossible, because you definitely didn't have a same foundation. It is hard.

To Chimwemwe, the opportunity to work brings with it the challenge of competing in a labor market which does not take into consideration her status as a refugee. Her lack of work experience owing to her background makes it hard for her to find jobs that she can easily be accepted into and perform better.

Rights and Freedoms

For participants, arriving in Canada meant that they were now able to have full rights and freedoms as persons, unlike the life of restricted freedoms that they were living while they were in countries of first asylum. Shirin found that resettlement into Canada accorded her the rights that made her to feel as a complete human being who can participate in the life of the community. She says:

> I think the huge effect for me like, and my personal feeling, my whole life now, I have rights. In short way, like I can say like, I'm human being, like, I'm like others, sometimes many people like work so hard in their life to not be like others. But for me, I like being like others. Now, it's super great. Just be able to participate in the community, like everyone, to apply to the jobs like everyone, you are going through, like the same thing that everyone goes through.

Chimwemwe explained that with the freedom that she found by being resettled into Canada, it gave her the ability to dream of whatever she can become, because the rights accorded

to her would allow her to achieve anything she could put her heart to, something which was not possible while she was in the country of first asylum. She says:

> I enjoy the freedom. I enjoy the ability to dream. It is one of the things that I'm so grateful for that I'm able to dream and I know that it doesn't matter whatever I can dream if I'm putting my heart on it anyway, I can do it which is something I never had because like, why am I even dreaming? Like, it doesn't really matter if I'm going to apply even if I'm lucky to apply to this school and they will take me, whatever they take me that's what I'm gonna do. So why would I even bother like dreaming of becoming a medical doctor if I don't really have if it doesn't matter, right? But living in Canada I'm able to dream you can choose whatever you want to do; you can pause whatever you do, you can easily walk out, and you can change whatever you don't like, you can ask help and you can find it, and you really like, you're able to live your life the way you want it which is something I never had so, definitely like, grateful.

Participants stated that their resettlement into Canada made them encounter different experiences which affected how they perceive Canadian society; how their resettlement contributed to their personal growth and development, as well as having rights and freedoms. These experiences were said to make them feeling belonging to Canada despite instances of racism and discrimination. Now that they are permanent residents of Canada, the participants explained how they define their national identity and citizenship.

Theme 6: Framing National Identity and Citizenship

As all participants were refugees and came to Canada without belonging to any nationality, their resettlement gave them an opportunity to belong to a country and acquire citizenship. Participants reported that their coming to Canada and the experiences that they had

to encounter within the Canadian society made them to be conscious of how they can describe themselves in terms of their nationality and citizenship. Having lived in a refugee camp for a considerable part of their lives and then being in Canada for a period of less than five years, all participants reported how they try to identify themselves. Three subthemes therefore emerged from this theme which are role of first country of asylum, family situation, and Citizenship granted in resettled country.

Role of Country of First Asylum

Participants mentioned how the country of first asylum plays a great role when they try to define their national identity. As they spent their formative years in those countries, they mentioned that they feel more attached to those countries despite the conditions that they lived under. Participants said that the connection with those countries of first asylum which were mostly as a result of the number of years spent in those countries still make them look back to those nations as members. It is only for their being recognized as citizens in Canada that they identify as Canadians, which is very difficult on their part. Jean-Pierre admitted that he struggles with identifying himself as, despite Canada giving him the freedom, he still identifies with the country that raised him. He says:

> I've had struggles over the years of how I identify myself and I think everybody close to me knows this. I've really struggled to identify myself. I wish it was easy you know, so when it comes to self-identification, I think I consider myself, other than be Canadian, you know, because obviously, they give me, they give me the freedom that I, you know, that was lacking, and that, you know, they, you know, they settled me, settled me and took me on as their own. So, other than that, I think, you know, if you told me about that apart from Canada, what's the country that you actually identify with, and I'd say,

> Malawi, as a country that I identify with, and it's, you know, it's where I have most friends, because obviously, that's where I was raised, it's where I have most friends, it's where I did my school, you know, and, you know, that's the story of my life. Because regardless of how, you know, old I will grow. When I have kids, grandkids, I'll be able to tell them, okay, this is where I was raised. And this is where I did my school and everything. That's where I come from. That's my identity. I think every man has the, you know, has the right to identify themselves, the country they feel more connected to, you know, and for me, I think that's Malawi, you know, about Canada, we'll see, we'll see in a couple of years or something like that. I spent 15 years in Malawi, you know, and that's more than half my life. That's more than half the life I've lived. And that's a lot. I think that's what, that's what if anybody would ask me like, okay, apart from Canada, what country, what's, what's your country? What's the country, you know, you can say that's home? You know, I'd say Malawi, that's, you know, that's where my parents are, that's where they are and, you know, that's where my family is. That's where I feel connected more.

John Bosco says the hardships that he faced in Malawi, which was his country of first asylum, cannot be compared to the opportunities that he got to the extent of getting a scholarship and resettlement to Canada. He says:

> I usually say that Malawi is my first home, because that's where I grew up. That's where I spent... I was like in Malawi, like at five years, I grew up; did my education, completed and came, came to, coz I usually have to say, Malawi is my, my country. And then Canada is my other country. I know I lived like in a refugee camp in hardship. But that's where I gained, my education, that's where I was, my foundation was made. I had a good

> foundation, because I had to get higher education. And then that education, pushed me to come to Canada. So, I'm usually grateful to say that I had like good education in Malawi. I didn't know anything about Rwanda or Tanzania; was born in Tanzania. I left Tanzania, when I was very young, went to Malawi. That's where, like, my life started. That's where I start growing up, seeing things, seeing people. So that's why I usually say, even if I do my education, get my citizenship, if I want to do something for my country, if I want to give back to my community, I'd go to Malawi, to say that I come up with a project to say thank you to the community I know all didn't go well but say, thank you.

With the opportunities granted to him despite the hardships he faced in Malawi, his country of first asylum, John Bosco hopes that he will be able to give back to his community of Malawi when an opportunity arises later in the future after completing his studies in Canada.

Chimwemwe admits facing an identity crisis but eventually chooses to identify with her country of first asylum because of the other opportunities that she found, and her familiarity with that country. She says:

> It is so crazy, because sometimes I'm like, okay, it doesn't really matter. Sometimes I would be like, it doesn't really matter what I consider myself as but what it is that I have in my hands. And that is where I face an identity crisis. Because, I'm not okay... do I identify myself as Rwandese but like we fled and we... there was no safety and like, the country was able to accommodate us. So, it doesn't even feel like home anyways, the fact that I wasn't able to be there, right? And living in Malawi and the experiences there, like refugee, you're not considered to be one of them. Like they can tell from a distance... no like, it doesn't matter how many years you have been living there, they still don't see you as a Malawian and you still have that status of a refugee. And coming here to Canada as well.

> I'm not I'm not a citizen, yet. But even, even if I will get my citizen for me, I still question if it is just the fact if I'm just considering myself a Canadian because of that document and the privileges that comes with it, do I actually really fit in, do I actually see myself as a Canadian? I still struggle with answering that and I really like still struggle like to consider myself like wait... like, to actually answer that question. Like ok, what citizenship do I hold, where do I actually belong? If I was to be honest and be like, Okay, where do I feel like I belong? I obviously feel like I belong in Malawi because that's where I grew up. That's where I made all the memories. That's where my family still is. And that's where I grew up that's why I learned whatever I learned and I know now I still love the country in that it built me, regardless of how hard it might have been, I still owe it, like, I was able to like, to build up that resilience and make it so, I still owe it to Malawi. That's where... that's the only country that I know the ins and outs of, and that's the country that I hold so much love for, that's the only country that I can go there and be part of and like, I would speak fluently, like that's, that's home for me, because home is where like you feel welcome.

For Chimwemwe, the fact that her parents fled Rwanda, their country of origin, as it had become unsafe for them to live in it is enough for her to not consider it as her home. While being welcomed and offered a citizenship in Canada would seem as an easy way of identifying oneself with that country, Chimwemwe still feels not belonging to Canada as she lacks any meaningful connection to it. Rather, she finds Malawi as a country to identify with as she grew up there and feels welcomed.

Family Situation

Some participants explained that they define their citizenship according to the varying situations that their families are in. While appreciating that Canada provided them with a good

living environment as well as all the opportunities that they may want in life, the fact that their families are still in refugee camps under rough conditions in countries outside of Canada make them still identify themselves as belonging to those countries. Shirin, who still has her family and her fiancé in Jordan still feels not connected to Canada as her people are in despicable conditions. She says:

> So like for me since I came, like I'm thinking about my family, my fiancée who are like staying in Jordan. I couldn't like settle as much like trying to help my family. Like if I'm going to have a nice meal like outside and hang out with the friends, the only things that come to my mind is like my family in the camp... like, they can't even eat, can't even afford like, a meal like this. I know I am a Syrian, but I feel I don't have home right now like Syria is not my home. Jordan is not my home, Canada is not my home until now because I am alone here. I have friends but my family, my fiancé, my sister, none of them is here. So maybe in the future when we will gather here this one will be like more home for me, but until now like it's a great country who will give me a fortune and study to have rights again to meet people but still like there's not that strong contact to the, like land itself.

Shirin finds it problematic in identifying her nationality as the war is still ongoing in her home country of Syria, while she does also not feel welcomed in Jordan, and she cannot say she is Canadian because her family is still not there with her. The fact that her family are finding it hard to afford a decent meal makes her postpone her sense of belonging to Canada to a time when her family joins her.

Citizenship Granted in Resettled Country

Some participants explained that, despite the struggle that they find in identifying their national identity, the fact that Canada offered them an opportunity to become citizens helps them

to describe themselves as Canadians. They stated that, with no other home to return to, as well as the acceptance that they received from Canada, they choose to describe themselves as Canadians. Thoko says:

> I consider myself a citizen of Canada because I cannot go back home as in, in Rwanda. And I cannot go back to Malawi and be like, Oh, I'm a citizen of Malawi, because I mean, I'm not allowed to. If there is anything with the near future, in the near future, I'll just be a Canadian citizen. I'm obviously going to be identifying myself as Canadian because that's the country that accepts me and gives me home and gives me the opportunities and the life that I deserve and the rights that I deserve as a human being.

With her country of origin and the country of her first asylum not being viable options where she can go back to, Thoko sees herself embracing Canada as her country of citizenship because it is the country offering her a home and the many other privileges that allow her to feel as belonging there.

Parents' Country of Origin

Some participants explained that they choose to identify with the nationalities of their parents whenever they are attempting to define their own national identity. Despite their not having stayed in their parents' countries of origin, they said they grew up in countries of first asylum being treated as foreigners so much that they adopted their parents' countries of origin as their own homes as well. Their coming to Canada did not change a thing as they continue to identify with their parents' countries of origin. Thoko says:

> In terms of citizenship right now I'm a citizen of Rwanda, because that's where my parents were from. But two years, this is my third year in Canada, in August, I qualify to be a citizen of Canada, I'll be a citizen of Canada. So, for right now, I'm a permanent

resident, but I have a citizenship of Rwanda.

Calvin, whose parents fled from the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo to a refugee camp in Malawi, shares similar sentiments as he says:

> I'm a permanent resident of Canada and originally from Congo… Congolese, I won't denounce my roots, I'm Congolese. But right now, a permanent resident of Canada, soon to be a citizen of Canada.

Participants stated that their coming to Canada made them to start asking themselves how they can define themselves in terms of their nationality. They stated that, in the course of defining their national identity, the role that their country of first asylum played, the situations that their families are still in, the citizenship that they were granted with by the government of Canada, and their parents' countries of origin play a crucial role.

Summary of Results

This chapter presented the research findings from the interviews that I carried out. Participants were students that are currently in Canadian universities under the World University Service of Canada – Student Refugee Program. I employed the phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of students that are resettled from refugee camps and brought to study in Canadian universities under the WUSC – Student Refugee Program. All participants stated that they lived most of their lives in countries of first asylum. They described the harsh conditions that they lived in while they were in refugee camps. Participants also explained how being refugees affected them as they lived in countries which greatly restricted their freedoms and rights as they were constricted in refugee camps.

The participants described the WUSC – Student Refugee Program and how it helps to motivate students to work hard in school so that they can later get a change of getting a

scholarship and be resettled into Canada. They explained how WUSC Student Refugee Program is seen as a way to getting freedom, as well as described the competition that is involved in the application process. Participants discussed how WUSC prepared them for life in Canada.

Participants discussed their experiences upon arrival in Canada, explaining the challenges that they encounter including language difficulties, academic challenges, family responsibilities, loneliness and home sickness, and lacking a sense of belonging to Canada. In light of these experiences, participants explained how WUSC supports them; with some participants appreciating the role that WUSC plays in their lives, while others bemoaning the lack of continued support from WUSC.

Participants talked about how resettlement has impacted their lives. They explained their perceptions of Canada and how those perceptions have impacted their integration into the Canadian society; how the resettlement led to their growth and development, as well as the rights and freedoms they are enjoying in Canada. Participants also discussed how they frame their national identity as their coming to Canada allowed them to acquire a citizenship. Some participants mentioned the impact that the country of first asylum still has when they try to define their national identity, with others explaining that it is their families' situation that helps them define their national identity, while others pinned it on the citizenship that they were granted when they arrived in Canada as the easiest way for them to define their national identity. The following chapter will interpret the findings of this research, discuss how the findings affect refugee students in the WUSC – Student Refugee Program as they navigate their lives in Canada, and suggest areas of future research.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to understand the meaning of the lived experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in Canadian universities under World University Service of Canada –Student Refugee Program. The participants were current refugee students in Canadian universities that were admitted and resettled through the WUSC – Student Refugee Program. While there is research on experiences of refugee students in institutions of higher learning, there remains limited research on the experiences of refugee students that are resettled unaccompanied through private sponsorship programs. Six participants took part in the semi-structured interviews that were conducted via Zoom. Data were analyzed using the phenomenological approach. This section answers the research questions, discusses the findings in line with previous literature, examine their implications, and provides suggestions for further study. The main research questions were: (a). What are the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds under the WUSC-Student Refugee Program when navigating higher education in Canada? and, (b). How does WUSC prepare and support students for life in Canada? Twenty-two semi-structured questions were used to elicit responses from the six refugee students that are in Canadian universities to answer the two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of students from refugee background under the WUSC-Student Refugee Program when navigating higher education in Canada?

As explained in the findings, the resettlement of young refugee student exposes them to different experiences as they navigate higher education in Canada. The experiences that these refugee students undergo are described in terms of academic, as well as social experiences.

Academic Experiences

This describes the academic experiences that refugee students in the WUSC – Student Refugee Program undergo in Canadian universities. Participants discussed the opportunities and challenges that they encounter as they navigate higher education in Canada. From the analysis of the data, WUSC – Student Refugee Program can be credited for offering participants with a great opportunity to access quality education in Canada's Universities which they could not afford on their own. Fratzke, Zanzuchi, et al. (2021) describe how the WUSC Student Refugee Program provides opportunities to refugee students to pursue higher education in Canadian tertiary institutions. They explain that refugee students that take this scholarship and resettlement opportunity receive support from WUSC and are given "permanent residence status, granting them access to a broad range of rights on equal footing with Canadian students" (p.87). From the interviews, participants appreciated how great the WUSC Student Refugee Program is to them. The program was seen to be very meaningful to mostly participants that were resettled from Dzaleka refugee camp as they said it had an impact in how they performed in schools from a young age owing to its competitiveness as well as the hope of resettlement that it presented unlike to the participant from Zaatari refugee camp who was not interested in moving away from her family. Participants acknowledged that the program assisted them to access higher education which they could not afford, not only owing to their refugee status but also, due to their economic status. Participants further appreciated the quality of education that they receive in the Canadian universities as they are admitted into top and well-resourced universities which are far much better than those in countries where they came from.

However, the opportunity of accessing higher education in Canada brought with it challenges that the refugee students faced in their academics. They first faced the English language barrier as all participants came from non-English speaking countries, yet English was

the language of instruction in the universities. Bajwa et al. (2017) argue that refugee students lack English fluency which makes them to be less prepared for the literacy demands of first-year university than native English speakers. Participants discussed how difficult it was for them to understand lectures due to their professors' deep English accents. They further explained that their coming from countries where English was a second language made it difficult for them to participate in class which greatly affected their learning.

Nevertheless, recognizing the language challenges that refugee students face, some participants said that there were some universities that provided English language programs that prepare students for university studies. The participants admitted that those programs were of great help to them as they equipped them with the four skills of language namely; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Apart for the language difficulties that the participants faced, they also talked about the academic challenges that they encountered upon their coming to Canada. Anderson (2020) argues that refugee students often encounter academic challenges in their participation in higher education due to their background. The most academic challenge that participants talked about was the different pedagogy that they encountered when they came to Canada. Most participants explained how their background as refugees affected them academically by looking at the different teaching and assessment methods that are used in the countries of their first asylum and Canada. Participants stated that, as they did High School in refugee camps, the way they were being taught and assessed came to be different from how it is done in Canada, which made them to be facing challenges. Some participants stated that they found the academic demands in Canadian universities very challenging as they came from education backgrounds that did not demand so much student participation in their own learning. Participants said that they felt being

overwhelmed by the continuous assessment tests that they had to take from time to time and the required class participation which they were not used to from their previous school environments.

Despite the many academic challenges that they encountered; participants mentioned their commitment to finishing their studies. According to Shakya, Guruge, et al. (2010), refugee students have strong aspirations for higher education as they want to study and overcome some pre-migration experiences they encountered while in countries of first asylum where they lacked opportunities for higher education. For some participants, the harsh experiences they encountered pre-migration, fortified their resilience when they came to Canada and meeting some academic challenges. Shields and Lujan (2019) define resilience among refugee students as "capacity building, successful adaption, and sustained competence in the face of stressors and risk taking [like migration and settlement]; it involves building assets and mobilizing strategies to enhance signs of thriving in the everyday lives of vulnerable youth who have had to deal with stressors, threat, adversity, and trauma" (p.2). Participants felt like their experiences had prepared them enough for any other hardship they may face and were therefore committed to attaining their academic goals. Most participants saw the education opportunity that they were granted through the WUSC Student Refugee Program as a chance at creating a future for themselves and their families. Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity of having their education in a developed country full of other opportunities for their personal growth as well.

In light of these different challenges, participants talked about the different sources of support when they encounter academic challenges. Msengi et al. (2020) argue that peer support is one of the factors that enhance refugee students' resilience and ensure success in school. Some

participants therefore made use of peers along with other resources to deal with the academic challenges that they encountered. With strong communities of both refugee and international students in their respective universities, participants said they usually reached out to them to get support whenever they encounter challenges. They said their peers were a good resource as they could relate with them in their predicaments, having had gone through similar challenges themselves.

Participants also explained that technology and the internet were the go-to resource in the face of academic challenges. Some participants said they asked to record the lectures and listen to them later at their own pace, as well as utilized YouTube videos to understand what they learnt in class. These helped them to adapt to the learning and easily navigate the first year of university education.

From the findings, the refugee students' academic experiences in Canadian universities included the opportunities of learning in top universities as well as the challenges that they encountered in language and different pedagogy. With the challenges encountered, refugee students used various resources as well as personal resilience to surmount them and navigate through their studies.

Social Experiences

The other experience that the refugee students encountered were the social experiences. Joyce et al. (2010) posit that refugees' transitioning from one country to another often includes changes in every aspect of their daily lives. The students' coming to a new country exposed them to a new culture, which called for their acculturation into the Canadian society. Roche and Garcini (2020) define acculturation as a socio-cultural process where there is a change as a result of continuous contact among members of two or more cultural groups. Glass (2021) argues that

"students do not just move from one country to another, they occupy spaces and places that shape their identities and human experiences" (p.177). As individuals undergo the acculturation process through either assimilation, separation, integration, or marginalization (Berry, 1997), the participants reported varying experiences on their interaction with the Canadian culture.

Some participants explained the culture shock that they experienced in their encounter with the Canadian culture. Moufakkir (2013) describes culture shock as a situation when there is a feeling of confusion or disorientation as a result of an encounter with a different culture. Participants mentioned the individualistic Canadian culture that they found themselves in which was different from their collectivistic cultures as a cause of concern to them. Some participants gave an example of a need to schedule appointments even for a visit to a friend which is not the case in the countries that they came from.

Participants also talked about experiencing loneliness and homesickness. Belau, Becher, and Kraemer (2021) reported that there are high cases of feelings of loneliness among refugee populations due to loss of family and friends throughout the migratory journey. Participants reported lacking close friends or family with whom they could share their personal thoughts and feelings. With their families still in refugee camps outside of Canada and having very few Canadian friends, participants said that it is always hard during school holidays when all those friends have gone to their homes, and they are left in the universities' residence halls. This made them yearn for their homes which, unfortunately, they could not go to as it would mean returning to the refugee camps.

The other social experience that participants reported was the change in their responsibility in their families which had an impact on how they encountered the Canadian culture. Most participants reported that, since their families are still in refugee camps, they took

the breadwinner role in their families where they were expected to be providing for those families. This had a toll on their studies as well as their building relationships with people around them as they had to share their time between school and work, leaving little time for social interactions. Shakya et al (2010) argue that "juggling these new and multiple family responsibilities in Canada can be "overwhelming" for refugee youth and can "overshadow" their educational aspirations and responsibilities" (p.70). Some participants reported the inner struggle that this new responsibility posed on them as they contemplated trying to meet the needs of their family at the expense of their education.

Participants reported the various strategies that they use whenever they encounter various challenges. They explained the support that WUSC gives them, which some maintained was inadequate. They also reported that they seek peer as well as institutional support in the face of challenges. Anderson (2020) emphasized the need for support for refugee students' socialization into Canadian universities and communities.

The academic and social experiences reported by the participants had a profound impact on how the participants underwent the acculturation process. For most participants, integration was the main strategy that they used to acculturate into the Canadian society. As integration involves a person keeping their culture while also connecting to the new culture (Berry, 1997) most participants admitted to maintaining their own culture while learning the Canadian culture. Participants discussed their appreciation of Canadian culture vis-à-vis, their food, as well as their warm hospitality. Some participants reported that they felt welcomed and therefore saw no need for separation where they had to maintain their own culture and never connect to a new culture as the people they interacted with were very welcoming and kind.

For most participants, integration was as a result of the circumstances that they found themselves in as a result of their having their families still outside of Canada and their being students in Canada. Participants had to maintain multiple national identities as they felt attached to multiple countries as it is part of their heritage. Participants explained their attachment to, their parents' original home countries, which they unfortunately could not return to; the countries of first asylum, where most participants grew up in; and, Canada, where participants are now doing their studies. Joyce et al. (2010) argue that one of the challenges that refugee youth face is that they try to accommodate the culture of their homeland, the culture of their new country, as well as the culture of refugee resettlement. Their identity is therefore tied to those cultures.

As was discussed by the participants, WUSC's pre-departure orientation for the participants emphasizes integration of students to the Canadian culture. Participants stated that WUSC ensures that the students maintain their culture and yet ably interact with other cultures that are prevalent in Canada. Participants employed integration as an acculturation strategy unlike assimilation where "individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures" (Berry, 2005, p.9) as they said they still feel proud of their cultures and insisted on maintaining it while making contacts with other cultures. The pride in holding on to their culture did not entail separation as an acculturation strategy as it would mean avoiding interacting with others (Berry, 2005) which is not the case with the participants. Participants talked about celebrating the cultural diversity that is in Canada which helps them to feel as a part of Canada's social fabric. No participant explained using marginalization as an acculturation strategy, where there is little interest in maintaining own culture or relating with other cultures (Berry, 2005), as they said their status as students from refugee backgrounds requires that they learn Canadian culture so that can successfully navigate life in Canada. They

said that, since most peers within the WUSC Student Refugee Program shared similar ethnic language and other cultural aspects, it was easy to maintain their culture as well as they interacted with their peers.

Research Question 2: How does WUSC prepare and support students for life in Canada?

WUSC – Student Refugee Program is a scholarship program that takes students from refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda for resettlement to Canada and admission into Canadian universities (WUSC, 2022). As explained in the findings, refugee students spend most of their lives in refugee camps where living conditions are deplorable and there are no opportunities for higher education. It is WUSC that provides them with the opportunity to attain tertiary education through the Student Refugee Program.

For successful transition from refugee camps to university campuses, WUSC conducted pre-departure orientation to prepare students for life in Canada. Fratzke et al. (2021) recommend that, for successful resettlement of refugees to take place, there must be predeparture orientation and plans for how refugees will be welcomed after their arrival in the resettled country. Hadfield et al. (2017) argue that living in a refugee camp is one of the traumatic experiences that refugees face thus the need to prepare them for life in a resettled country. Participants reported the traumatic experiences that they had to endure while they were in camps. They talked about how they struggled to get food as they relied on the monthly food rations from the UNHCR which were not adequate, the restrictions that they were subjected to as they lived in refugee camps, the hopelessness that they had to live with as there were no opportunities for any social mobility, and the lack of rights and freedoms.

Participants reported that WUSC prepared them for life in Canada through an intensive program which involved learning English language, information about university life, as well as

aspects of Canadian culture. WUSC reportedly aimed at helping the students to use integration strategy for their acculturation process. Participants reported that the preparation really worked as they acquired required social cues for their smooth integration into the Canadian society. Participants reported that the WUSC pre-departure orientation is mostly designed to make them integrate into the wider Canadian society. Participants emphasized how the orientation was designed not to have them lose their culture or force them adopt a new culture.

In order to support refugees when they are in the country, Canada's Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program stipulate that "private sponsors must provide financial and emotional support to any refugees they sponsor for the length of the sponsorship period, or until the refugee can support themselves, if this happens during that period" (Government of Canada, par. 3, 2022). WUSC as a private sponsor is therefore mandated to provide financial and emotional support to the refugee students. Participants reported varied levels of support that they received from WUSC. Some participants stated that their scholarships only covered the first year of their studies while others said it covered the whole duration of their university study. The level of support that students received greatly affected their acculturation process. For those participants that received one-year scholarships, they said they did not get time to be involved in WUSC activities on campus as they had to work and get money for their tuition and upkeep, which affected their access to the emotional support that they may have received from WUSC. Some other participants said they got student loans after the end of WUSC's financial support from their second year. Nevertheless, they still needed to work to supplement their incomes.

Summary of Findings

In summary, this study explored the experiences of refugee students as they navigate higher education in Canada. The study participants were refugee students that were recipients of

the WUSC – Student Refugee Program which is a program that combines resettlement and scholarship opportunities. The findings of the study indicate that the WUSC – Student Refugee Program is a source of hope and purpose among refugee students while they are in refugee camps as it gives them hope that they may get an opportunity to later attain higher education and get a citizenship which will accord them rights and freedoms that they lack as refugees in countries of first asylum. The hope of WUSC – Student Refugee Program made participants work hard in high school so as to get good grades and qualify for it. Later, their coming to Canada allows for their attaining of those rights and freedoms as participants are designated permanent residency which will later make them become Canadian citizens, thus accompanying its privileges.

Participants greatly appreciated WUSC for the opportunity that they were given to be in Canadian universities, attaining high quality education; as well as being given full rights and privileges of being permanent residents of Canada. However, findings indicate that transitioning from refugee camps to the university campus and navigating through life in Canada is not easy for the participants. Participants mentioned the academic challenges that they had to deal with from the very first year. Coming from under resourced schools in refugee camps, they found themselves lagging behind in some topics and technological skills than their peers who attended schools in the developed world, which was to their disadvantage. During lectures, participants mentioned that the professors did not consider their needs as they treated all students as though they have a similar Canadian educational background or necessary technological knowledge for their studies. Participants also faced English language challenge as they came from non-English speaking countries and could not easily keep up with the academic English language used in class and books.

While participants mentioned that WUSC had prepared them for Canadian life and culture, findings indicate that the reality of life in Canada brought about cultural shock to them. This was as a result of WUSC's lack of ongoing engagement with participants upon arrival in Canada, as study participants indicated. Findings also showed that participants dealt with loneliness and homesickness. This was as a result of not having family members or close relations near them. Participants indicated that they often felt lonely during holidays or when they were facing challenges that needed someone to talk to about it. Findings further indicated the financial responsibilities that participants took over their families. Their coming to Canada meant that they had an opportunity to make some money unlike their families back in the refugee camps. Knowing their families' predicament, they had no choice but to make sure that they work and provide for their families despite their own financial struggles. The lack of family support as well as financial challenges that participants encounter contributed to mental health issues that the study participants face as the findings indicated. Participants felt the need to get more support from WUSC and the Canadian government to consider reuniting families.

This study also shows in the findings that participants still struggle to carve a clear national identity for themselves. Participants felt more attached to various countries that have had an influence on their migratory journey to Canada. Participants admitted that, so far, their attachment to Canada was the official documentation that they received as permanent residents, but their hearts remained in countries of their parents' birth or countries of first asylum. Participants' acculturation process therefore used the integration strategy as they maintained their own culture while learning Canadian culture. Finally, participants remained grateful to the Canadian government for having a program as WUSC - Student Refugee program which allows

for refugee students to have a chance at life where they are given a future, through scholarships, and a home, through resettlement.

Implications of the Study

Research findings indicate that refugee students in the WUSC Student refugee Program have varied experiences as they navigate their academic and social lives and get settled in Canada. Owing to their background, their relatively young age, and coming to Canada unaccompanied, transitioning to higher education and settling in Canada brings with it academic, social, psychological, as well as financial challenges that they must overcome. These findings have implications for resettlement organizations, national governments, university faculty, students' advisors, as well as refugee students.

Refugee students are taken from deplorable refugee camps where life is tough and most of them have been exposed to violence and trauma. Resettling them without reliable sources of socioemotional support only exposes them to more trauma. Refugee students are left to negotiate with transitioning into higher education, new culture in a new country, as well as into adulthood without the support of the familiar familial support and social networks that they grew up with in the refugee camps. I therefore recommend to WUSC to be giving prospective students during the pre-departure orientation adequate information on the realities of life in resettled countries as well as the academic demands for higher education. Upon their arrival in Canada, WUSC needs to ensure that there is regular psychosocial support for the resettled students throughout their university education cycle. I strongly recommend regular check-ins on the wellness of the students in the program as some participants had indicated that they rarely hear from the WUSC office once their sponsorship period is over.

Further to the above, WUSC must also introduce topics in financial literacy and mental health in their pre-departure orientation to prepare prospective students in handling finances after the end of WUSC's scholarship duration, as well as opening them up to the realities of mental health issues and the need to open up to responsible officers who may be strangers to them, which is not a common cultural practice among cultures in Africa or the Middle East where the refugee students come from. As participants indicated that they suffer from loneliness and homesickness, I recommend that WUSC should consider pairing students and host families so that the students can be finding a home and a family that they can spend holidays with as well having an opportunity to be immersed into the Canadian culture.

I further recommend that WUSC should consider collaborating with other private resettlement organizations to help in the reunification of families for students that have been selected into the Student Refugee Program. Participants lamented how close to impossible it is for them to see their families again; going by the experiences of other beneficiaries of the program that were resettled more than ten years ago and are yet to see their families that are languishing in refugee camps thus, the need for WUSC to be working with other organizations already privately resettling families from refugee camps. Having the students reunited with their families will help reduce the burden that they said they bear of being breadwinners in their homes, as there will be shared economic responsibilities, as well as having a readily available support that they yearn for from time to time.

The refugee problem keeps getting worse every passing day. The need to find durable solutions remains necessary. National governments need to develop policies that would ensure that resettled students are reunited with their families. Programs such as WUSC Student Refugee Program enroll students that are either adolescents or young adults and are still developing their

sense of identity. Coupled with the task of transitioning into higher education, participants found this period to be psychologically draining and requiring family support. From the study, some refugee students were said to have resorted to drug and substance abuse which is a threat to their own lives and the country's public health. Reuniting refugee students with their families will ensure that there is parental guidance and support and lessen the challenges that refugee students face.

Refugee students come from an academic background where the curriculum used may not be as comprehensive as that used in developed countries. They might not also be advanced in their grasp of the English language. Coming to a classroom of native English speakers who had their high school studies in places where they had Advanced Placement classes leave the refugee students at a disadvantage. Faculty therefore needs to be deliberate in taking note of the students' background and tailor their lectures to meet refugee students' needs as well. Participants talked about visiting professors to seek assistance during their office hours but even then, the help that they were given did not consider their refugee background and their academic deficiencies. Faculty must also be making regular assessments on the refugee students to see their progress in their classes.

Most refugee students come from countries where the issues of mental health issues are not taken seriously. The idea of seeking professional help over mental health issues is therefore very remote to them. Compounding this problem is the fact that refugee students come from a background where it is hard to trust a stranger due to the high cases of spying by some governments' agencies on refugees. Participants therefore could not seek help from students' advisors whenever facing any challenge. Students' advisors must therefore devise means of

building good rapport with refugee students where there can be open and honest conversations about issues affecting their lives.

The many challenges that refugee students face call for personal agency on their part to deal with them. The challenges with technology, for example, require that students learn the basics before they leave for university. I recommend that every student admitted into the WUSC Student Refugee Program should be taking the computer literacy studies that are offered by some institutions in refugee camps for free. I also recommend that refugee students should be open enough to utilize the campus resources for their total wellbeing. Knowing that their families are far from them, they should be taking it upon themselves to seek needed support that universities provide for their students. Study participants admitted that there were campus resources that they could use but they just could not utilize them as they were not used to opening up to strangers. This calls for a mindset change and an understanding of the cultural differences that are there between their own culture and the host country's culture where there is professionalism in handling personal and private matters. This will go a long way in helping the refugee students to not struggle very much in their acculturation process.

Limitations of the Study

First and foremost, there is limited research on the experiences of refugee students that are resettled by private sponsors which rendered my literature review very limited. Secondly, not only was it difficult to recruit participants into the study, but it was also very hard to have those that accepted to participate to open up on some of their experiences because most of them said they had trust issues with strangers, despite all the guarantees for confidentiality and anonymity. Some participants said that they could not talk about all of their experiences with WUSC as it would mean not appreciating everything it had done for them. The other limitation was that the

research interviews were conducted online via Zoom. With participants that were already hard to have them open up, and having the interviews online, it was hard to prompt them more. With only six participants involved in the study, the results cannot be generalized to the entire refugee students within the WUSC Student Refugee Program.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study can be validated by conducting a large-scale study which may need to involve many participants in a face-face setting. It will need to use interviews as well as focus group discussions for a richer amount of data and guaranteed anonymity for the participants. There is need to delve deep into the mental health status of refugee students in programs such as WUSC Student Refugee Program as participants in this study only mentioned in passing but it appears it is a big issue among refugee students who are resettled unaccompanied.

Researcher Reflections

This study has helped me appreciate the experiences that young refugee students undergo as they transition into higher education in Canada through the WUSC Student Refugee Program. My interest in understanding students' experiences with WUSC Student Refugee Program started when I had some of my former high school students admitted into the program and resettled to Canada. Knowing their relatively young age at the time, and the fact that they were resettled to Canada unaccompanied, I wanted to understand how they process the whole resettlement experience from pre-departure in the refugee camp to post-arrival in Canadian universities. I was also curious to see how their background as refugees who had spent most of their lives in refugee camps, having with them limited rights and freedoms, would have an impact on their acculturation process in becoming Canadian citizens. These were coupled with

the cynicism that I had read on the operations of private organizations supporting refugee resettlement.

It was therefore a wonderful experience to learn of all the opportunities and challenges that refugee students met through their resettlement with the WUSC Student Refugee Program. It was interesting to learn how young refugee students are motivated to change the trajectories of their and families' lives using the opportunity given them by WUSC. It was pleasing to learn that most students decided to use their background as a motivation to be ambassadors of peace as they said they would not want anyone to ever become a refugee as a result of war or conflict. I came to interact with young men and women who have developed a vision of how they want to impact the world after being given an opportunity to higher education as well as rights and freedoms. This study allowed me to reflect on how some countries, mostly those in Africa, are losing out on intelligent young men and women to other countries by denying them higher education opportunities simply because of their refugee status. I interviewed participants that are very smart and visionary. If they were integrated into those countries and allowed to attain higher education, they could have been the solution to some of the problems that African countries are facing. As it is, they will be of use to some other nations who accepted the intelligent ones and gave them a place to call home.

Conducting this study also helped to dispel the cynicism in me that I had held against organizations such as WUSC. While I previously heard that they were corrupt in the way they recruited beneficiaries into the program, participants' experiences taught me that they were in no way connected to the selection committee and had no ability in any way to influence their being selected into the program. Having read the way WUSC operates, I also came to appreciate its work in supporting students from refugee backgrounds and understood its limitations in the way

they can offer further support to them as per its mandate of only resettling students and not their dependents.

Finally, it was concerning to find that there is limited research on the experiences of refugee students that are resettled through private sponsorship and yet fulfilling to know that I am one of the few researching on such a refugee student demographic.

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APPENDIX A. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is your name?

2. How do you identify your gender?

3. What is your age?

4. What is your country of birth?

5. In which country did you do your secondary education?

6. From which country were you resettled to Canada?

7. In which year were you resettled to Canada?

8. What is your year in college?

9. What is your major/program of study?

Conversation Prompts:

1. You stated that you were resettled from COUNTRY X. What was life like living and growing up in COUNTRY X?

2. As you attended secondary school in COUNTRY X, was resettlement to Canada in any of your plans? How did this affect your studies?

3. Can you recall the moment that you had heard that you have been accepted into the WUSC-SRP? What was your immediate reaction to it? What were your expectations of life in Canada?

4. How did WUSC prepare you for life in Canada? Do you think it was adequate? Would you suggest any improvements or changes?

5. As a university student in Canada, how does WUSC support you? Are there any obligations that you have to fulfill as part of the program? How do you feel about them?

6. How does being a student from a refugee background affect your studies? Are there any challenges/opportunities that you face because of your status? What are the sources of support in your studies?

- Were there any differences in the teaching styles between where you did your secondary education and there?

- Role of technology in learning. Any impact?

7. Please share with me your experiences of being resettled into Canada as a student. What would you say are the factors that have helped you to resettle and live there as you are doing? What else do you think WUSC can do to help people like you easily resettle in Canada?

- How has resettlement affected you as a person…? Relationships.. Your growth… how has resettlement helped you to define yourself as a person (Identity)

8. You indicated that you did your secondary education in COUNTRY X and got resettled into Canada, how do you identify yourself in terms of citizenship? Which country do you consider yourself as a citizen? Why?

9. Can you please share with me your perception of how receptive the Canadian society is to students from refugee background that were resettled? Do you feel accepted/rejected? Do you have any instance that help explain this?

10. What are your plans after your studies? Will you continue staying in Canada or go elsewhere? Why?

11. Do you have any members of your family that were resettled to Canada or any other country outside your country of first asylum?

12. Can you tell me about your experiences in Canada? What do you enjoy most about Canada? What do you enjoy least about Canada?

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

BGSU
Bowling Green State University

INFORMED CONSENT FOR:

The experiences of refugee university students in Canada under the WUSC-Student Refugee Program

PROJECT SUMMARY

This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of students with refugee backgrounds (SRBs) in Canadian universities. It seeks to understand how these students live their academic and social lives having been taken from another country where they were staying as refugees and brought to Canada to be resettled without their families through a scholarship that is provided by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in its Student Refugee Program (SRP).

Participation in this study poses no greater risk than those experienced in daily life. Participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Your identity, and the identity of the country you came from as well as the university where you are studying will be kept confidential. Participation in this study will include an individual interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes.

INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCHER

My name is Yamikani Falinya, and I am a graduate student in the Cross-Cultural and International Education program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), under the direction of faculty advisor Dr. Christy Galletta Horner. For my Master's thesis, I am seeking to better understand the experiences of students with refugee backgrounds in Canadian universities under the WUSC-SRP. You have been identified as a potential participant in this project because you are a student with refugee background at a Canadian university under the WUSC-Student Refugee Program.

PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of students with refugee background in Canadian universities that are in the WUSC-Student Refugee Program. It seeks to explore the experiences of the students as they navigate their academic and social lives within the WUSC-SRP and get themselves settled in Canada. While there are no explicit benefits to you as an individual participant, participation in this study may increase the chances of improving the WUSC-School Refugee Program. Findings of the study may also be useful not only to WUSC but also, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations working in the provision of opportunities for higher education to refugees.

PROCEDURE

BGSU IRB - APPROVED FOR USE
IRBNet ID # _1847417_
EFFECTIVE _03/11/2022_
EXPIRES _02/27/2023_

Students with refugee background under the WUSC-School Refugee Program such as yourself will be interviewed individually to gain a better understanding on your experiences as students as you resettle in Canada. Interviews will take about 60-90 minutes via Zoom. You are advised to use your personal device during the interview, for privacy purposes, as university/company owned devices might have tracking software installed in them. The interview will be recorded with an audio recorder, and the recording will be used only for the researcher's reference. Soon after the interview is complete, the researcher will transcribe the audio recording, removing any identifiers, such as your name. If your real name or the name of the school is mentioned in the interview, it will be transcribed using a pseudonym. Once the recording is successfully transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed. You may be contacted in the future for follow-up questions or clarifications, up until the time that the final research report is completed.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without explanation or penalty. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University, or the researcher (Yamikani Falinya). If you decide to participate now, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any later time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is complete, your data will be destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY PROTECTION

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, meaning that the researcher can determine the identities of the participants, but will not reveal those identities. Your identity will be protected with a pseudonym (fake name). Data will be stored by the researcher (Yamikani Falinya) on a password protected computer and in a locked office. Only Yamikani Falinya and his advisor, Dr. Christine Galletta Horner, will have access to the data. The data will be kept for three (3) years after the project is complete before it is destroyed to maintain confidentiality. Signed consent forms and any identifying information will be stored separately from the collected data, in a locked drawer of a locked office.

RISKS

Participation poses no greater risk than experienced in daily life. However, due to the phenomenological design, it is possible that other participants will be able to identify you from information you provide. The researcher will safeguard against this by utilizing pseudonyms and refraining from the disclosure of any unnecessary identifying information in the final research report, which will be my thesis. The thesis will be shared with WUSC to help them in their program iteration.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time regarding the study, procedures, or your participation in the research, you may contact the researcher, Yamikani Falinya, at yamikaf@bgsu.edu or 419-315-7610, or the faculty advisor for the project, Dr. Christine Galletta Horner, at cgallet@bgsu.edu or 412-330-7161. You may also contact the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Institutional

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Review Board, at 419-372-7716 or irb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you for your time.

CONSENT

My signature (Printed Name) below certifies that I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I have received my own electronic copy of this form via Zoom. I agree to participate in this research.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name	Participant Initials	Date

I would like to continue using the following pseudonym (fake name) for the purposes of this study:

_____

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